



Radiation Therapy (Side Effects)



Overview

Radiation therapy is an effective way to destroy cancer cells. But in the process, it can also damage healthy cells in your body. This creates serious side effects for many patients.

Fatigue and Loss of Appetite

Radiation therapy can cause you to feel fatigued. You may not have the energy to do the things you enjoy. You may have trouble eating and digesting food. You may lose your appetite, and you may experience nausea and vomiting. You may have diarrhea.

Mouth and Throat

Radiation therapy can make your mouth and throat sore and dry. Food may taste different. Swallowing can be difficult.

Skin Problems

If radiation passed through your skin, your skin may become red, irritated and swollen. It may dry out, itch and peel. It may be extremely sensitive to sunlight, so you will need to protect your skin from sunburn.

Hair Loss

Radiation therapy can also cause you to lose your hair. This will only happen in the area that was treated. In most cases your hair will grow back after treatment, but it may be thinner than it was before.

Problems with Blood Cells

Radiation can also damage blood cells. If your white blood cell levels drop, you will be more vulnerable to infection. Your doctor will closely monitor your blood cell count during the course of your treatment.

Emotional Health

Many patients struggle with their emotions during cancer treatment and recovery. If you feel overwhelmed or depressed, talk to your doctor, your family and your friends. Ask about support programs to help you cope with your situation.

Conclusion

Not all patients experience severe side effects from radiation therapy. The type of radiation you receive, the frequency of your treatment and your body's response all play a role in how you feel as you fight cancer. Talk to your doctor about any specific concerns you may have so you can chart the best course toward recovery.

