This leaflet aims to provide information for patients receiving a course of radiation therapy to the brain area. Your doctor may have already talked to you about this treatment but please ask if anything is still worrying you, however small you think it is. Each course of treatment is tailored to the individual, so your treatment plan may not be the same as somebody else’s.

Before Treatment:

Before radiation therapy begins you may have a specially fitted mask made for your treatment. This device helps to keep your head in the same position and allows marks to be drawn on it. There will not be any marks drawn on your skin. The mask also helps the radiation therapists to locate the exact treatment area. If the mask is too tight please let the radiation therapists know as it can be removed and adjusted. Please see the leaflet on The Mould Room, which tells you more about this process.

Loss of appetite:

Loss of appetite, you may notice that you are eating less than normal, or you have lost weight. These side effects described above can make eating and drinking difficult. Food and drink often lose or change their taste and texture, and become unappealing. However, it is important to try and remain well nourished, so try the following suggestions:

- Eat small meals at regular intervals
- Try out different foods
- Concentrate on the smell of the food rather than the taste.

When the course of treatment is complete your appetite will gradually return to normal, though this may take several months.

After Treatment:

Radiation therapy is a cumulative treatment so the reactions may persist for several weeks following completion of your treatment. The reactions are usually most severe in the 1-2 weeks after the treatment finishes. You should continue to follow advice until these side effects have subsided.

On your final day of treatment you will be given an appointment to see the doctor in approximately 6-8 weeks. At this appointment the doctor will discuss your progress.

We are here to help, if you would like more information on any aspect of your treatment, or you are troubled by anything, please speak to us.
Skin Reaction
A skin reaction may occur in the treated area. It is not uncommon for the scalp area to become sore. By the end of the treatment your skin in the treated area will probably be itchy, dry and reddened. You are advised to take the following precautions:

+ Wash your hair gently, at most once a week with an un-perfumed (baby) shampoo.
+ Gently pat hair with a towel and let it dry naturally in a warm room.
+ Only use a hairdryer on cool setting, as heat can irritate the scalp.
+ Protect your head from sunlight.
+ You may gently bathe or shower using warm water.
+ Protect the skin from wind, sun and direct heat, by wearing a hat / cap / scarf made preferably form natural fibres such as cotton.
+ Do not expose skin to hot water bottles, ice packs etc.
+ Do not rub or scratch the area, as this will only exacerbate the reaction.
+ If your skin becomes uncomfortably dry, the radiation therapists can advise you on suitable creams to use.

Fatigue
Fatigue is another commonly experienced side effect of radiation therapy. It can range from a mild loss of energy to an overwhelming “bone tired” feeling that is not always relieved by rest. You may feel sluggish and lacking in energy. Tiredness may interfere with your mood and can make other symptoms feel worse, so it is important that you:

+ Rest whenever you feel tired, particularly before and after treatment sessions.
+ Plan periods of exercise for those times when you feel most energetic. Gentle exercise such as walking 2-3 times a week can help reduce fatigue.
+ Do the things that you enjoy and that make you feel good whether it is reading, visiting with friends or spending time outdoors.
+ Set aside part of the day when you can have time for yourself, and if you wish, continues any quiet interests that you had before your illness.
+ Maintain a healthy balanced diet.

You may be tired for several months after you finish radiation therapy. It is difficult to get through a long course of treatment without feeling low at some point, and it is quite normal to feel up and down during radiation therapy and for several weeks afterwards. Please let us know when things get tough and we will do our best to help you.

It is important to increase your fluid intake while on treatment. Try to increase your daily intake by at least three glasses. Include fluids such as water, milk and juices. Do not include tea, coffee, or caffeine drinks.

Hair Loss
Hair loss only occurs in the area of the head that is being treated. Generally hair will start to fall out after treatment, and it is normal for this to take between two and six weeks. The loss of hair may continue for up to three months after treatment. Hair will normally grow back, but it may be a different shade of color. You may be advised to shave your head, or you may choose to wear a wig or a hat to help you feel good about your appearance during this time. As your hair regrows it will be different from your previous hair. Side Effects:

Radiation therapy is painless. However there are some side effects which are associated with radiation therapy and you may experience one or more of them gradually developing over the course of the treatment. Please note that it is rare for one patient to experience all of these side effects. Please remember to always let the doctor know if you develop any new symptoms either during or after radiation therapy treatment.

Early on you may find that you experience similar symptoms to those, which you experienced when you were first diagnosed, such as headaches, nausea, drowsiness, confusion or forgetfulness. Steroids are often prescribed to relieve these symptoms. You will be provided with more information about steroids if they are prescribed for you.