

The effects of Radiation on the Brain



Sometimes treatment includes radiotherapy to the brain. This may be to all of the brain or just part of it depending on the type and place of the tumour.

Any problems from radiotherapy to the brain are usually discovered in the early years after treatment. It may be that special help is needed at school for certain subjects. Even after school, if you have learning difficulties and are at college you can apply for extra monies to help buy computers for your studies. (See main booklet for section on disabilities).

Radiation to the brain has important effects on growth and development. This is because an area of the brain called the pituitary gland often receives a dose of radiotherapy, at the time of your treatment. The pituitary gland helps regulate your growth and your development from childhood to adulthood. It does this by producing different hormones. One of the hormones is called growth hormone and if you do not produce enough growth hormone from the pituitary gland, you will not grow. You may have needed treatment with synthetic (man-made) growth hormone to help you grow. Growth hormone treatment often stops when your bones are mature, usually about the age of sixteen. Growth hormone is known to help regulate your metabolism and general well being as well as your growth. For this reason it is now sometimes recommended for adults to continue to have growth hormone replacement even when they have stopped growing.

The pituitary gland produces other hormones including thyroid hormones and sex hormones. The doctor at the follow up clinic will check that the hormone levels are normal with routine blood tests. If your thyroid hormone has been affected by the radiation and you are not producing enough you will need to take thyroxine tablets as replacement.

You may have received some sex hormone replacement to help you go through physical development as a teenager. You may still be having some hormone replacement. This is important to help keep your bones strong and for your general well being.

It is usual for a specialist in hormones (an Endocrinologist) to be involved in the follow up clinic and they will be able to talk to you about all the issues of hormone replacement. If you do not see an Endocrinologist and would like to you can ask at the clinic for a referral.

I didn't beat cancer to spend the rest of my life worrying!

Vanessa Moss

visit www.aftercure.org for tips, advice and other useful websites

Keep a record of sites you find useful: