

Possible effects of brain tumours

and their treatment

Cognitive

Difficulties with:

Attention/ Concentration	Communication (speech; understanding language/instructions; reading social cues)	Processing speed/ Problem-Solving
Memory	Reasoning	Planning
Learning		Visual-spatial awareness

Auditory

Deafness
Partial hearing loss

Taste, appetite and digestion

Nausea or vomiting	Changes in taste/ appetite
Sore mouth	Bowel & bladder problems (incontinence/double incontinence)
Diarrhoea	
Constipation	
Heartburn	

Changes in appearance

Hair loss	Ommaya reservoir or shunt (device for removing excess fluid in the brain - visible bump on the head)
Scars	
Weight gain or loss	Slow growth/short stature
Puffiness of the face	Delayed puberty
Water retention in hands & feet	
Central/PICC lines/ portacath (tubes for delivering chemotherapy drugs that stay in place during course of treatment)	

Hydrocephalus

(build-up of fluid in the brain)

Leading to:

Headaches	Blurred vision
Being sick	Difficulty walking

Visual

Blindness/partial sight	Unco-ordinated eye movements
Cataracts	Other visual defects e.g. blind spots
Double vision	

Skin

Rashes	Increased sensitivity to sunlight
Changes in colour	Bruising
Skin thinning	

Fine motor control

Difficulties with:

Writing
Getting dressed

Mobility

Difficulties with:

Walking	Muscle wasting & cramps
Climbing stairs	Use of wheelchair or walking aids
Co-ordination	
Balance	

Nerve damage

Leading to:

Pain in extremities in cold weather	Difficulty making facial expressions
--	---

General effects:

Lowered immunity

Increased risk of infections, more severe forms of common, childhood illnesses e.g. chickenpox

Fatigue

Extreme tiredness (physical and mental), drowsiness, lethargy, sleep disturbance, somnolence syndrome (excessive drowsiness that can occur 4-6 weeks after radiotherapy)

Behavioural effects

Personality changes, tantrums/anger/irritability, anti-social behaviour, impulsiveness, heightened or inhibited sexual behaviour

Endocrine changes

Leading to:

Tiredness, weight gain, depression, growth impairment, sensitivity to cold, feeling thirsty, needing to go to the toilet more often, diabetes, infertility, erectile dysfunction

Emotional effects

Loss of self-confidence, low self-esteem, feelings of social isolation, anxiety and 'scanxiety' (anxiety about scan results), depression, fear of tumour recurring, fear of dying, (effect on siblings/friends)

Every young person is different and will experience different side-effects.

The side-effects will depend on the type and location of the tumour, the treatment received and the individual response.

One person will not have all these side-effects.

Some will be short-term; others may be long-term or delayed.

