

Tips for managing hair loss



This information offers suggestions that may help with managing hair loss. If this is happening to you, don't despair!

Why hair loss occurs

Hair loss from chemotherapy occurs because hair follicles are weakened. Some chemotherapy drugs cause your hair to drop out much more quickly than it can be replaced by new hair growth; however, this condition is usually temporary. Depending on the type of chemotherapy you receive, hair loss may start anywhere from seven to 21 days after you begin treatment. After treatment finishes, your hair will re-grow slowly, sometimes over a period of months. When your hair does grow back, it will probably be a different texture and different colour. For example, sometimes curly hair grows back straight, or dark hair becomes lighter. These changes are usually not permanent.

Radiation to the head or scalp, however, can cause permanent hair loss. Depending on where radiation is directed, you may also experience hair loss on your legs, arms, underarms, pubic area, chest, eyelashes, eyebrows, and the beard area for men.

Talk to your doctor or nurse about what to expect.

Here are some questions you might want to ask:

1. When will my hair begin to fall out?
2. How much hair loss should I expect?
3. Is there any way of delaying hair loss?
4. When can I expect my hair to grow back?

Hair can come out at different rates. It may come out in handfuls or it may come out in patches.

Coping with hair loss

Practical suggestions

- A government subsidy is available to help you buy

a wig or head covering. A medical certificate is required for this. Ask your doctor or nurse for a form.

- If you are buying a wig, it is helpful to do so before all of your hair falls out so that you can get a good colour match.
- Some people prefer to wear a turban, hat or scarf instead of a wig. Turbans are useful for keeping your head warm, especially at night. Your scalp can be sensitive when you lose your hair. At night you may find it is more comfortable to wear a cotton cap or sleep on a satin pillowcase.
- Some people prefer to have their hair cut very short prior to hair loss whilst others prefer to have their head shaved. Ask your hairdresser for advice.
- If you decide not to cover your head, use SPF 30+ sunscreen to protect your scalp.
- Avoid hair-colouring products or perms for approximately six months after finishing your treatment.
- If you have children or grandchildren, they may find it upsetting to see you without any hair. Let them know that it is going to happen. Tell them about what, if anything, you are going to wear on your head and let them know when your hair will grow back.

Seeking support

- **Contact Look Good ... Feel Better**, a programme that can help you maintain your appearance and boost your self-confidence when you are experiencing side effects from cancer.
- **Join a support group.** You'll get plenty of emotional support and it may help you feel less alone. Plus, you will share valuable tips for coping and receive helpful guidance.

- **Talk to someone else who has had hair loss.**
Ask your local Cancer Society about a referral to Cancer Connect.
- **Talk to a social worker or counsellor** who can help you find resources, make difficult decisions, and feel more in control.
- **Contact the Cancer Society.** The Cancer Society may have turbans or patterns for turbans and they can direct you to wig and head covering suppliers in your area.

The quality of your life during and after chemotherapy or radiation treatment can be enhanced by preparing yourself in advance for hair loss. Don't be afraid to talk to your doctor or nurse and seek emotional support.