

Managing Hair Loss



Not all cancer treatments cause hair loss, please ask your care team if this side effect applies to you and your treatment.

Chemotherapy not only damages rapidly dividing cells such as cancer cells, but also healthy cells, such as hair follicles. Some chemotherapy drugs can damage hair follicles which may lead to hair loss, also called alopecia.

When hair loss occurs, it typically begins 2 or 3 weeks after the first chemotherapy treatment.

In addition to hair on your head, you may lose eyebrows, eyelashes, facial hair, pubic hair, underarm hair, and leg hair. The amount of hair loss depends on the specific chemotherapy drug being used to treat your cancer.

Taking Action to Cope with Hair Loss

Hair loss is a temporary side effect of chemotherapy. After you've completed your chemo treatment, your hair will grow back and may look different than it did before.

In the meantime, here are a few tips to help you cope with the temporary hair loss:

- Cut your hair before it falls out. The experience of losing hair is sometimes worse than dealing with it once it's gone. If you expect to lose all or most of your hair, cutting it first may be easier.
- Plan ahead. Shop for a wig before your hair is gone, especially if you wish to match your natural color. Or, take this opportunity to try a different color.
- Try hats or head scarves; these are good alternatives or a complement to a wig.
- Remember to cover your head or use sunscreen on your scalp. Skin that has been covered with hair may be particularly sensitive to the sun's UV rays.
- Keep your scalp clean by using a gentle shampoo, like baby shampoo.
- Do not use Nioxin or other scalp stimulator products. While they are great post-chemo, we find they can be an irritant to the scalp during treatment. Unfortunately, chemotherapy induced hair loss will not be helped by these products because you are losing hair from a cellular level.
- Avoid lotions full of petroleum and fragrances. Petroleum suffocates the skin. Raw, organic coconut oil is an option. This will keep the scalp hydrated and help with minor irritation. Emu oil can help with an itchy scalp.
- Some insurance companies cover the cost of a wig. Talk with your insurance company.
- Treat your new hair gently once it grows back. Avoid chemicals, bleach, peroxide, or colors.
- The American Cancer Society's program, "Look Good...Feel Better" has materials available about wigs and pointers on head coverings. Get your free copy by calling **1-800-395-LOOK**.