

Hair Loss (Alopecia) and Cancer Treatment

Some types of chemotherapy make the hair on your head and body fall out, and radiation therapy can cause hair loss in the treated area. Hair loss is called alopecia. It's usually temporary—hair often grows back a few months after treatment ends. Gentle hair care and talking about your feelings can help you cope.

This page is for people who may lose their hair from cancer treatment. It covers ways to manage hair loss, what to expect as it grows back, and questions for your care team.

The simple version

Some types of chemotherapy cause the hair on your head and other parts of your body to fall out. Radiation therapy can also cause hair loss on the part of the body being treated. Hair loss is called alopecia.

Not everyone with cancer loses their hair. Whether it happens depends on the specific treatment. Talk with your health care team to learn if the treatment you will be receiving causes hair loss. Your doctor or nurse can share strategies that have helped others.

Ways to manage hair loss

- **Treat your hair gently.** Use a soft-bristle brush or a wide-tooth comb. Avoid hair dryers, irons, and products like gels or clips that may hurt your scalp. Wash your hair less often with a mild shampoo, be very gentle, and pat it dry with a soft towel.
- **You have choices.** Some people cut their hair short to make it easier to deal with when it starts to fall out. Others shave their head. If you do, use an electric shaver so you won't cut yourself. If you plan to buy a wig, get one while you still have hair so you can match the color. If wigs feel itchy and hot, try a comfortable scarf or turban.
- **Protect and care for your scalp.** Use sunscreen or wear a hat outside. Choose a comfortable scarf or hat that keeps your head warm. If your scalp itches or feels tender, lotions and conditioners can help.
- **Talk about your feelings.** Many people feel angry, depressed, or embarrassed about hair loss. It can help to share these feelings with someone who understands, including others who have lost their hair during treatment. Talking openly with your children and close family can help too. Let them know you expect to lose your hair during treatment.

When your hair grows back

Hair loss is usually temporary.

- **Be gentle.** When your hair starts to grow back, avoid too much brushing, curling, and blow-drying, and you may not want to wash it as often.
- **After chemotherapy.** Hair often grows back in 2 to 3 months after treatment has ended. Your new hair will be very fine at first, and it can be curlier, straighter, or even a different color. In time, it may go back to how it was before.
- **After radiation therapy.** Hair often grows back in 3 to 6 months after treatment ends. If you received a very high dose of radiation, your hair may grow back thinner, or not at all, on the part of your body that received radiation.

Preparing to talk with your team

Making a list of questions before your visit can help you feel more prepared. You might ask:

- Is my treatment likely to cause hair loss?
- How can I protect and care for my head?
- Where can I get a wig or hairpiece?
- What support groups might help?
- When will my hair grow back?

Source: National Cancer Institute (cancer.gov/about-cancer/treatment/side-effects/hair-loss)

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