

ONCOLOGY

After Chemotherapy Care Instructions

Hair Loss (Alopecia)

What is alopecia?

Hair loss is a side effect of some, but not all, chemotherapy medicines. The hair follicle is composed of rapidly dividing cells. Certain chemotherapy drugs have a greater tendency to destroy these cells. Hair loss from chemotherapy will vary depending on the medicines you receive and your own kind of hair growth patterns.

Hair loss may occur from your head as well as other areas of your body. Hair loss typically starts 2–4 weeks after your treatments have started. You may experience mild scalp pain before the hair loss. Your hair may thin gradually or fall out completely over a few days.

Hair loss from chemotherapy is usually reversible. Your hair starts growing again at about 1 to 2 months after chemotherapy treatment is completed. Your hair may be different in color and texture than it was before. It will return to your normal hair features after a few months. Hair may begin to regrow during chemotherapy; this does not mean the chemotherapy has stopped working. Some of your hair follicles can be in a “resting” phase when you receive chemotherapy and are not affected by it.

The chemotherapy drugs with a high likelihood of causing hair loss ranging from mild thinning to complete loss include: bleomycin, cyclophosphamide, dactinomycin, daunorubicin, doxorubicin, docetaxel, epirubicin, etoposide, idarubicin, ifosfamide, irinotecan, methotrexate, mitomycin, mitoxantrone, paclitaxel, teniposide, topotecan, vinblastine, and vincristine.

What can I do at home to care for myself?

- Shop for a wig or head covering (scarf, hat, turban, etc.) before you lose all your hair. It will be easier to match the wig to your normal hair. If you cannot do this, save some of your hair so you can match it later.
- Cut your hair shorter. Some people prefer to shave their heads completely so they do not have to deal with their hair falling out.

continued

*What resources
can help me with
hair loss?*

- Use a mild shampoo and conditioner to maintain moisture. Limit washings to 2–3 times a week.
- Brush gently with a soft-bristled brush.
- Limit use of hair dryers, curling irons, and chemicals, such as dyes and perms, to help decrease damage to your existing hair follicles.
- Sleep on a satin pillowcase to avoid friction between your hair and scalp.
- If you find your scalp is sensitive once the hair loss is complete, use an oil or moisturizer and gently massage your scalp.
- Keep your head covered in the summer to prevent sunburn or use a sunscreen with a SPF of at least 15 on your scalp.
- Keep your head covered in the winter. Cover your head to prevent heat loss if a wig is not worn.
- You may use a hair net to assist with hair collection.

- Your chemotherapy nurse can give you phone numbers of local wig shops.
- A community-based, free, national service program, “Look Good...Feel Better,” teaches female cancer patients beauty techniques to help restore their appearance and self-image during chemotherapy treatments. To get more information, call (800) 395-LOOK (5665) or visit **lookgoodfeelbetter.org**.
- Call the American Cancer Society at (800) 227-2345 for information on hair loss.