Hair Loss

(Alopecia)

"Losing my hair was hard at first. Then I got used to it, and it wasn't so bad. Sometimes I wore a scarf and other times I left my head uncovered."

It may help to join a support group to talk with others whose hair has fallen out during cancer treatment.

Questions other people have asked:

Why does hair fall out?

Chemotherapy can harm the cells that make hair. This means that hair on your head and anywhere on your body may fall out. Hair loss is called alopecia.

When will my hair start to fall out?

Your hair may start to fall out 2 to 3 weeks after chemotherapy begins.

What can I do before my hair falls out?

"Treat your hair gently."

Wash it with a mild shampoo. Pat it dry with a soft towel.

"Cut your hair short."

Some people choose to cut their hair short.

"Shave your head."

If you shave your head, use an electric shaver so you won't cut your scalp.

"Get a wig."

If you plan to buy a wig or hairpiece, get one while you still have hair. This way you can match it to the color of your hair.

National Cancer Institute

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What should I do after my hair falls out?

- Protect your head from the sun. Use sunscreen or wear a hat when you are outside.
- Protect your head from the cold. Wear a hat or scarf.
- Try wearing a soft scarf when you sleep.

When will my hair grow back?

Most likely your hair will grow back in 2 to 3 months after chemotherapy. Sometimes your new hair can be curlier or straighter—or even a different color. In time it may go back to how it was before treatment.

Will insurance pay for a wig?

Yes, wigs are often paid for by health insurance. If not, it may help to get a prescription from your doctor for a "hair prosthesis." You can also ask your social worker for help.

Questions to ask your doctor or nurse:

1. Will my hair fall out?
2. How should I protect and care for my head?
3. Where can I get a wig or hairpiece? How can I get my health insurance to pay for it?
4. Are there support groups that can help me cope with hair loss?
5. When will my hair grow back?

Resources that can help you:

American Cancer Society
1-800-227-2345
(1-800-ACS-2345)
www.cancer.org

Look Good...Feel Better
1-800-395-5665
(1-800-395-LOOK)
www.lookgoodfeelbetter.org

Revised February 2012

How can we help?

National Cancer Institute's Cancer Information Service

Phone: 1-800-422-6237 (1-800-4-CANCER)
Web: www.cancer.gov
Online Chat: www.cancer.gov/livehelp

NCI has a series of 18 Chemotherapy Side Effects Sheets at:
www.cancer.gov/chemo-side-effects

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