



Getting Help for Hair Loss

Some cancer treatments make people lose some or all of their hair. It's normal to feel upset about losing your hair. It helps to know that hair grows back, and you can take steps to make hair loss less of a problem for you.

If your hair is going to fall out, it most often begins within 2 weeks of starting treatment and gets worse 1 to 2 months after therapy starts. But hair often starts to grow back even before treatment ends.

What causes hair loss in people with cancer?

Hair is constantly growing, with old hairs falling out and being replaced by new ones. Chemotherapy drugs often damage hair follicles, making hair fall out. Some chemo drugs can cause hair thinning or hair loss only on the scalp. Others can also cause the thinning or loss of pubic hair, arm and leg hair, eyebrows, or eyelashes. Radiation therapy to the head can also cause hair loss on the scalp.

Things you can do to prepare for hair loss

- Each person is different. Ask your doctor if hair loss is likely. If it is, ask if it will happen quickly or gradually.
- Talk to your health care team about whether a cooling cap might help reduce your risk. More

research is being done to understand how effective and safe cooling caps may be. There are some side effects of cooling caps to consider, such as headaches, scalp pain, and neck and shoulder discomfort. Talk to your health care team about the benefits, limits, and side effects of cooling caps.

- Wigs and other scalp coverings may be partially or fully covered by your health insurance. If so, ask your health care team for a wig prescription, which is typically written as a “cranial prosthesis.” The American Cancer Society “*tlc*” *Tender Loving Care*® program offers women dealing with appearance-related side effects of cancer treatment a variety of affordable wigs, hats, and scarves, as well as a full range of mastectomy products. The items can be purchased from the privacy of your own home by calling **1-800-850-9445** or by visiting the “*tlc*”™ website at **tlcdirect.org**.
- You might choose to cut your hair very short or even shave your head before it starts falling out.

Other things you can do when you have hair loss:

- Your scalp may feel itchy or sensitive. Be gentle when brushing and washing your hair. Using a wide-toothed comb may help.
- Hair loss might be somewhat reduced by avoiding too much brushing or pulling (which can happen when making braids or ponytails, using rollers, blow drying, or using curling or flat irons).
- If your hair becomes very thin or is completely gone during treatment, be sure to protect the skin on your scalp from heat, cold, and sun. Use a broad-spectrum sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 30 and wear a hat. In cold weather, wear a hat or scarf to cover your head and stay warm.
- When new hair starts to grow, it may break easily at first. Avoid perms and dyes for the first few months. Keep hair short and easy to style.



Tell your friends or loved ones what they can do to help. You might be able to cope better with their support and understanding.

For cancer information, day-to-day help, and emotional support, call the American Cancer Society at **1-800-227-2345** or visit us online at **www.cancer.org**. We're here when you need us.

