

Hair Loss

Hair loss is a common side effect of chemotherapy and radiation therapy. These treatments target cells in the body that grow very quickly—which include cancer cells as well as hair cells.

Hair loss can happen anywhere on the body. It usually begins two to three weeks after your first treatment.

The amount of hair you lose depends on the type of chemotherapy you get and the amount and location of radiation. Some treatments may cause thinning only you will notice, while others can cause total hair loss.

Chemotherapy causes more hair loss on the head and in the pubic area. Radiation therapy causes hair loss in the area that gets treatment.

What You Should Know About Hair Loss

- Your scalp may be tender before your hair begins to fall out.
- Your hair should start to grow back within four to six weeks after the last dose of chemotherapy. Hair may take longer than six weeks to grow back after radiation treatment.
- Trying to prevent hair loss during treatment is usually not effective. Most methods of trying to prevent hair loss are difficult and costly. We do not generally recommend them.
- After treatment, your hair may grow back with a different color and/or texture.

What Can I Do Before My Hair Falls Out?

- Visit a hair stylist or wig store before treatment begins. This may help you feel more prepared to manage hair loss.
- Use a soft-bristle brush or wide-toothed comb.
- Avoid braiding or pulling your hair into a ponytail, which can increase hair loss.
- Consider having your children or other loved ones help you cut your hair. This may help them better adapt to the change.

Other Helpful Suggestions

- Use a head covering for protection from sun, wind, and cold.
- Use sunscreen on your scalp.
- Use a soft, satiny pillowcase.
- Avoid hair treatments or chemicals on the scalp.
- If loss of eyelashes causes irritation in your eyes, talk to your treatment team about eye drops.
- Share your thoughts and feelings with a loved one or in a support group.

For More Information

Ask your provider for a copy of our Wig and Head Covering Resources sheet or visit the Cancer Learning Center.

It is common to lose some or all of your hair during chemotherapy and radiation.