

Cancer Treatment and Hair Loss

Because it is visible to others, hair loss (alopecia) can be one of the more distressing aspects of your treatment for cancer. We understand because we have been there ourselves.

How much hair is lost?

Chemotherapy may affect all body hair. Since scalp hair is generally in an active growth phase, it is affected by chemotherapy more often than other body hair. Hair loss is usually temporary among patients receiving chemotherapy.

Radiation therapy affects hair in the area that is being irradiated. With radiation therapy, hair loss may or may not be permanent. The amount of hair loss can range from thinning to complete baldness. For patients treated with chemotherapy, the degree of hair loss is dependent on the drug and dosage used. The quantity of hair loss as a result of radiation therapy is dose and site dependent.

Why does hair fall out?

Cancer cells divide and grow rapidly. Hair is also made up of fast growing cells. Radiation therapy and chemotherapy are designed to affect any cells that multiply quickly and cannot differentiate between cancer cells and hair cells. This causes the hair to fall out at the root.

What can I do to prepare myself?

Being prepared and talking about how you feel with others can help you adjust to this temporary change in appearance. If you have children it is important to prepare them for this change.

Eyebrow or eyelash loss....

Eyelashes normally protect your eyes from dirt, dust and grit. Without them it is a good idea to wear glasses or sunglasses when you are outdoors. Artificial Tears may keep your eyes lubricated.

Some people choose to 'create' eyebrows with an eyebrow pencil.

If your hair is likely to thin.....

- Use a gentle shampoo & conditioner.
- Dry your hair naturally.
- Brush/comb your hair gently. Think about using a baby brush.
- Some women prefer to cut their hair into a short style as this can give the appearance of greater volume.
- Protect your scalp from the sun. Wear a hat or scarf.
- Avoid heated rollers/curling wands/straighteners.
- Avoid perming or straightening your hair.
- If you colour your hair, ask your hairdresser to use/ recommend a vegetable hair colour rather than a chemical dye.
- Use a satin rather than cotton pillow cover.

If you are likely to lose all of your hair.....

- Hair usually starts to fall out about 2-3 weeks after the first treatment and it generally happens quickly. First your scalp may become tender, dry and itchy. A flaky scalp can be removed by rubbing the scalp with moist cotton wool and then massaging the scalp with oil (Amanita have rich massage oil).
- Seeing your hair on the pillow can be upsetting. You may wish to wear a turban to catch the hair.
- Some people choose to shave their hair and it gets the trauma of the hair loss process over and done with.
- If you have lost hair under your armpits, avoid using perfumed deodorants. Use a mild unperfumed deodorant such as crystal. Amanita stocks a range of these from which to choose.

Draw attention away from the hair by highlighting other features....

- For women, a little extra makeup around the eyes, cheekbones or lips will direct attention to your face.
- Experiment with new colours for eyes and lips.
- Experiment with jewellery. Chains can emphasize the neckline while striking earrings can enhance a short hairstyle or look good with a hat or scarf.
- Look at different headwear options.

What hair alternatives are available?

- Some people choose to wear a wig. Choose a natural looking hair wig that will stay in place, is easy to care for, comfortable to wear, and reasonably priced
- Head wraps that are cotton or polyester
- Scarves and turbans. Try wrapping and twisting coloured scarves around the turban for a different look
- Cotton hats

Whatever your needs, Amanita can help fit you with your choice of head covering.

Especially for children

Children can also lose their hair during chemotherapy or radiation therapy. It can be difficult for children to face friends at school or playing sport. Teasing may occur and this maybe upsetting. Ask the school teacher/counselor for support.

Children may find a wig a bother and choose not to wear one. Some girls may like a fun, colourful wig. Baseball caps and beanies are popular headwear for children. Scarves & head wraps are also popular and can be tied in lots of different ways.

Will my hair grow back?

Your hair loss caused by chemotherapy is temporary. Usually when treatment is finished, the hair will start to grow back and this may happen even before the treatment has been completed.

The first hairs are usually very fine and they reappear within a month or 6 weeks of stopping treatment. Within 3 to 6 months you will probably have a full head of hair.

You may notice some changes in your hair when it grows back. For example, it may be a little more curly, thicker or finer than before. It may grow back a different colour.

After radiotherapy your hair will usually grow back although it can take 6 to 12 months to grow back completely. You may find that the regrowth is patchy and it is also possible that the hair may not grow back at all.

Chemotherapy Treatments and Hair Loss

<i>Drug</i>	<i>Amount of hair loss to be expected</i>	<i>When hair is likely to fall out</i>
AC Adriamycin, Cyclophamide or EC (Epirubicin, Cyclophamide)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Complete hair loss on scalp• Possible loss of eyebrows, eyelashes and pubic hair• Hair under the armpit and the legs tend not to fall out	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Usually starts within 2/3 weeks of 1st treatment• The hair falls out rapidly over a few days
CMF (Cyclophosphamide Methotrexate, 5FU)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Most women will experience some degree of hair thinning of head hair over the course of the treatment• About 10-15% will experience hair loss• Significant enough to warrant a wig or head covering• Loss of eyebrows and eyelashes is not common	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gradual hair thinning over the course of treatment
AC followed by Taxotere OR Taxol	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Complete hair loss on scalp• Complete loss of eyebrows, eyelashes, pubic hair, and hair on legs, arms and armpits is common	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Usually starts within 2-3 weeks of chemotherapy treatment• Hair falls out rapidly, over a few days

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