

Hair Loss

What is it?

Hair loss (alopecia) can be one of the most upsetting side effects of chemotherapy. It occurs because chemotherapy drugs target quickly growing cells—including hair cells.

Hair loss may involve hair all over your body, including your eyebrows, eyelashes, and pubic hair. However, keep in mind that not all chemotherapy drugs lead to hair loss. Radiation to the brain can also cause hair loss, although your hair will usually grow back.

The most commonly used chemotherapy drugs associated with hair loss include Adriamycin® (doxorubicin), Ellence® (epirubicin), Cytoxan® (cyclophosphamide), Cosmegen® (dactinomycin), etoposide, Ifex® (ifosfamide), Taxol® (paclitaxel), and Taxotere® (docetaxel). Other drugs may just cause hair thinning.

Remember: *Your hair will grow back.* It typically starts to return about 2 to 3 months after your final treatment, although it may take 6 months to a year to completely grow back.

What are the symptoms?

Hair loss from chemotherapy typically occurs within 2 to 3 weeks of starting treatment. At first you may only see more hair than usual on your brush. Then one morning you may wake up to find all your hair on your pillow or see it clogging the drain when you shower.

Many chemotherapy patients prepare for hair loss by cutting their hair short or even shaving their heads before treatment begins.

How is it treated?

There is no treatment for chemotherapy-induced hair loss, except to be proactive in accepting this physical change in body image.



TIPS

Tips to Help

Losing your hair during cancer treatment can be devastating, both physically and emotionally. To make the loss of your hair easier to bear:

- Get a short haircut before beginning treatment or shave your head. It returns control to you.
- Shop for a wig before your hair is gone, especially if you want to match your natural color. Many insurance companies cover the cost of a wig for chemotherapy-related hair loss.
- Be gentle with your hair. Use mild shampoos and soft hair brushes and avoid chemicals, bleach, peroxide, or hair dye during treatment.
- Cover your head or use sunscreen (with an SPF of at least 15) on your scalp once your hair is gone.
- Try head coverings such as hats, scarves, and turbans instead of wigs.
- Accessorize with makeup and jewelry.
- Allow yourself to mourn the loss of your hair. Encourage discussion of your feelings and those of your loved ones as you go through this physical change.

Words to Know

Alopecia: Hair loss