

Hair Loss (alopecia)

Hair loss is a common side effect of chemotherapy, but not all drugs cause hair loss. Ask your doctor if you are likely to lose your hair with the drug or drugs you are taking.

When hair loss does occur, the hair may become thinner or fall out entirely. Many women are aware that they may lose the hair on their head, but are surprised to find that they also lose their hair in other areas including the head, face, arms and legs, underarms, and pubic area. The hair usually grows back after the treatments are over. Some people even start to get their hair back while they are still having treatments. As the hair grows back you may find it is a different colour or texture. It may even grow back curlier or thicker than before.

Hair loss does not always happen right away. It can start after a few treatments, or a few weeks after a treatment. Women often find that their head becomes sensitive before losing hair. If you do lose your hair, it may fall out gradually or in clumps and any hair that is still growing may become dull and dry. Even before you lose your hair it is important to take especial care of your scalp and hair. The following tips have been found helpful to others who have gone through this.

- Use a mild shampoo.
- Use a soft hairbrush.
- Use low heat when drying your hair.
- If you have long hair, have your hair cut short. A shorter style will make your hair look thicker and fuller. It also makes hair loss easier to accept. Seeing long locks of your hair on the pillow can be very distressing.
- Avoid dying, perming, or using other chemicals on your hair.
- Use a sun screen, sun block, hat, or scarf to protect your scalp from the sun.

Some women choose to wear a wig or turbans and scarves. Others leave their head uncovered. You may prefer to cover your head in public and leave it uncovered at home. Do whatever makes you feel most comfortable.

Losing hair from your head, face, or body can be hard to accept. Some women find it very hard to deal with, as it is so visible. Feeling angry or depressed is understandable. At the same time remember that it is a temporary side effect. Talking about your feelings will help. It is also a good idea talk with other women going through the same experience. Find out where a Look Good Feel Better course is going on in your neighbourhood (ask at your treatment center). They provide helpful tips and the opportunity to talk with other women who understand what you may be experiencing.