



For the Patient: Hair loss due to chemotherapy

BC Cancer Agency

- **Hair loss** affects many people undergoing cancer treatment. It is normal to feel distress about losing your hair. Talk to your healthcare team about what to expect from your treatment.
- **Chemotherapy** can cause hair loss by damaging hair follicles responsible for hair growth. Not all chemotherapy causes hair loss.
- Hair loss may be **complete**, may occur in **patches**, or in some cases, hair may simply become thin, dull, or dry. Hair loss may occur **all over the body**, including the head, face (eyelashes, eyebrows, and beard), arms, legs, underarms, and pubic area.
- Hair loss is almost always **temporary**. It may begin **1-3 weeks** after the first treatment and may begin to grow back **6-8 weeks** after the last treatment. Complete regrowth can take months. Some people notice hair regrowth between treatments. Hair that grows back may be of a slightly **different colour** or **texture**.

BEFORE TREATMENT STARTS:

- If you have **long hair**, you may want to cut it short using scissors or clippers. Avoid using a razor. Short hair tends to look thicker when hair loss occurs. Also, it may be a less dramatic change when the hair falls out.
- You may want to **talk** about hair loss to friends and family, especially children, before it occurs.
- You may want to consider and chose **head coverings** like hats, scarves, and wigs that are comfortable.
- If you plan to **purchase a wig**, it is a good idea to select one before hair loss occurs. If you have already lost your hair, take a recent colour photograph with you when selecting a wig. This way you can match your hair colour and style if you wish. Ask your hairdresser if they can style the wig for you.

HAIR AND SCALP CARE:

In most cases, hair loss due to chemotherapy is not preventable regardless of the care taken. The following recommendations may help when caring for your hair and scalp during and after cancer treatment:

- Be gentle with your hair. Choose a mild shampoo such as baby shampoo, a soft hairbrush, and set your hair dryer on low heat or let your hair dry naturally.
- Dyeing, perming, curling, or straightening your hair can make it even more dry and brittle. You may want to avoid these during treatment.
- Protect your scalp from the sun when outdoors. Wear a wide-brimmed hat or scarf or use a broad-spectrum sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 30.
- Wear a hat or scarf in cold weather to reduce the loss of body heat.
- Use a satin or satin-like pillow case. This will prevent pulling on your hair while you sleep.
- The **Look Good Feel Better Program®** is a workshop committed to helping women manage the appearance related effects of cancer and its treatment. Call 1-800-914-5665, visit www.lookgoodfeelbetter.ca, or contact a BC Cancer Agency library for more information.

FINANCIAL INFORMATION:

- Wigs are not covered by the Medical Services Plan of BC. Check with your extended health benefits plan for reimbursement. A prescription from your doctor will help document your claim.
- Donated wigs, hats, and scarves may be available from the Canadian Cancer Society or your local cancer centre. Contact your local hairdresser or wig salon if you wish to purchase a wig.
- Medical expenses, including wigs, may be claimed as a deduction on your income tax form. Please contact your local tax office for details.

Note: This information is specific to chemotherapy only, if your treatment includes radiation therapy to the scalp, please contact your radiation therapist or nurse.

CHECK WITH YOUR DOCTOR OR NURSE IF YOU HAVE FURTHER QUESTIONS