

## Losing Your Hair

### ***Chemotherapy (Chemo) and radiation treatments can cause hair loss.***

Losing hair upsets many cancer patients. The good news is that hair usually grows back. And, in the meantime, there are ways to manage or even disguise the problem.

### ***What causes hair loss?***

Powerful cancer treatments like radiation and chemo that kill cancer cells, also injure certain normal cells, especially those that grow and divide quickly. This includes hair cells. Barbershops and beauty parlors stay in business because hair cells divide frequently and hair grows quickly!

### ***Can I prevent hair loss?***

Scalp tourniquets and special cold caps to keep your scalp cold to reduce hair loss are controversial. While they may work for some people, they don't always work. Also, there are concerns that these methods might increase the chance of the cancer spreading to the scalp since they prevent the chemotherapy from getting to the scalp. There are no medications that have been shown to help reduce hair loss from chemotherapy.

### ***When will I lose my hair and how will it feel?***

Hair loss usually starts about 2 to 3 weeks after the start of some treatments. You may first notice hair loss when you take a shower. Or, you may see clumps of hair on your pillow in the



morning. Since hair helps keep your body warm, you may notice feeling 'cooler' with hair loss.

*Radiation* causes hair loss only in the areas that are treated.

*Chemo* can cause hair loss or hair thinning in several areas:

- Scalp—this may cause your scalp to feel tender, sore, or dry.
- Eyelashes and eyebrows
- Face
- Arms
- Legs
- Pubic areas

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## **Feeling angry, sad, or distressed is normal.**

While some cancer patients accept hair loss as a hopeful sign of treatment, others may feel a sense of loss. Some men or women may feel less attractive. Others may feel guilty because they care a lot about how they look. For some, losing their hair reminds them that they have cancer and ‘announces’ it to the world.

## **When will my hair grow back?**

Usually, hair grows back about 2 to 3 months after treatment ends. Sometimes it starts even before treatment ends. You may be in for a surprise. Your new hair may be a different color or texture.

## ***How can I deal with losing my hair?***

**Consider how you would like to deal with hair loss before your treatments begin.**

- Some find it helpful to cut their hair short or shave their head. If you would like to wear a hat or wig (hairpiece), you can shop in advance for hair coverings. Some cancer patients use a variety of scarves, hats, and a wig. Wigs are a tax-deductible medical expense and may be covered by your insurance. Ask your doctor for a prescription.

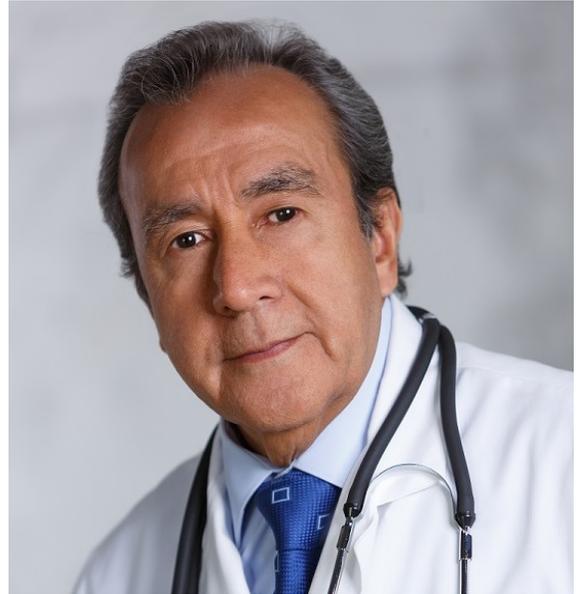
## **Protect your head from sun and extreme cold.**

- Stay out of the sun or be sure to wear a hat or wig to protect your scalp. Also, use sunscreen with an SPF of at least 15.
- If it’s cold, wear a hat. This may help to keep your head warm.

## **Be gentle with day to day care of your scalp.**

- Keep your hair and scalp clean, but don’t shampoo too often.

- Use a wide-toothed comb, to avoid pulling on hair.
- Avoid hot hair dryers or hair dyes. These dry your hair and can cause it to fall out more easily.



***It’s OK to talk about losing your hair and your feelings, and to ask for help.***

Most cancer patients find that losing their hair is stressful. We encourage you to talk with people who will understand — your healthcare team, family and friends, and others who have lost their hair due to cancer treatments.

Don’t let hair loss stop you from seeing people and doing things you enjoy. You will likely discover that your friends will show concern and others will hardly notice.

If your feelings overwhelm you or you find you cannot cope, ask for a referral to a social worker or counselor. You don’t need to suffer in silence or alone.

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This guide contains general information and is not meant to replace consultation with your doctor or nurse.

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