

# Tips for Managing Hair Loss



This Information Sheet offers suggestions that may help with managing hair loss. If this is happening to you, don't despair!

## Why hair loss occurs

Hair loss from chemotherapy occurs because hair follicles are weakened. Some chemotherapy drugs cause your hair to drop out much more quickly than it can be replaced by new hair growth. However, this condition is usually temporary. Depending on the type of chemotherapy you receive, hair loss may start anywhere from seven to 21 days after treatment begins. After treatment finishes your hair will re-grow slowly, sometimes over a period of months. When your hair does grow back, it will probably be a different texture and different colour. For example, sometimes curly hair grows back straight or dark hair becomes lighter. These changes usually are not permanent.

Radiation to the head or scalp, however, can cause permanent hair loss. Depending on where radiation is directed, you may also experience hair loss on your legs, arms, underarms, pubic area, chest, eyelashes, eyebrows, and beard for men.

Talk to your doctor or nurse about what to expect. Here are some questions you might want to ask:

1. When will my hair begin to fall out?
2. How much hair loss should I expect?
3. Is there any way of delaying hair loss?
4. When can I expect my hair to grow back?

## Coping with hair loss

- A government subsidy is available toward the purchase of a wig or head covering. A medical certificate is required for this. Ask your social worker or nurse for the appropriate form.
- If you are buying a wig it is helpful to do so before all of your hair falls out so that you can get a good colour match.
- Some people prefer to wear a turban, hat or scarf instead of a wig.
- Some people prefer to have their hair cut very short prior to hair loss whilst others prefer to have their head shaved. Ask your hairdresser for advice.
- Turbans are useful for keeping your head warm, especially at night.
- If you decide not to cover your head, use 30+ sunscreen to protect your scalp.
- Avoid hair-colouring products or perms for at least six months after finishing your treatment.

Talking to others who are also experiencing hair loss, who have gone through it, or who have professional experience will help you during this difficult period. Here are some suggestions:

1. For women having treatment for cancer **Look Good... Feel Better** is a programme teaching make-up and skin care techniques to help restore appearance.

2. **Join a support group.** You'll get plenty of emotional support and feel less alone. Plus, you'll share valuable tips for coping and you'll receive helpful guidance.
3. **Find a buddy** who understands what you're going through and call this person when you're feeling bad or uncertain about what to do.
4. **Talk to a counsellor** who will know how to help you find resources, make difficult decisions, and feel more in control.
5. **Contact the Cancer Society.** The Cancer Society has patterns for turbans and can direct you to wig and head covering suppliers in your area.

The quality of your life during and after chemotherapy or radiation therapy can be enhanced by preparing yourself in advance for hair loss. Don't be afraid to talk to your doctor or nurse and seek emotional support.