

Hair Loss

Hair loss (alopecia) is a common side effect of chemotherapy, but it doesn't always happen. Your doctor can tell you whether hair loss is likely to occur with the drug or drugs you are taking. When hair loss does occur, the hair may become thinner or may fall out entirely. The hair usually grows back after the treatments are over. Some people even start to get their hair back while they are still having treatment. In some cases, hair may grow back in a different colour or texture.

Hair loss can occur on all parts of the body, not just the head. Facial hair, arm and leg hair, underarm hair, and pubic hair all may be affected.

Hair loss usually doesn't happen right away; more often, it begins after a few treatments. At that point, hair may fall out gradually or in clumps. Any hair that is still growing may become dull and dry.

To care for your scalp and hair during chemotherapy:

- Use mild shampoos.
- Use soft hairbrushes
- Use low heat when drying your hair.
- Don't use brush rollers to set your hair.
- Don't dye your hair.
- Have your hair cut short. A shorter style will make your hair look thicker and fuller. It will also make hair loss easier to manage if it occurs.
- Use a sunscreen, sunblock, hat, or scarf to protect your scalp from the sun if you lose a lot of the hair on your head. Some people who lose all or most of their hair choose to wear turbans, scarves, caps, wigs, or hairpieces. Others leave their head uncovered. Still others switch back and forth, depending on whether they are in public or at home with friends and family members. There are no "right" or "wrong" choices; do whatever feels comfortable for you.

Here are some tips if you choose to cover your head:

- Get your wig or hairpiece before you lose a lot of hair. That way, you can match your natural colour and current hair style if you wish. You may be able to buy a wig or hairpiece at a specialty shop just for cancer patients. Someone even may come to your home to help you. You also can buy a wig or hairpiece through a catalogue or by phone.
- Consider borrowing a wig or hairpiece, rather than buying one.

Losing hair from your head, face, or body can be hard to accept. It's common--and perfectly all right--to feel angry or depressed about this loss. Talking about your feelings can help.

Fatigue/Anaemia

Chemotherapy can reduce the bone marrow's ability to make red blood cells, which carry oxygen to all parts of your body. When there are too few red blood cells, body tissues don't get enough oxygen to do their work. This condition is called anaemia.

Anaemia can make you feel very weak and tired. Other symptoms of anaemia include dizziness, chills, or shortness of breath. Be sure to report any of these symptoms to your doctor. Your doctor will check your blood cell count often during your treatment. If your red count falls too low, you may need a blood transfusion to increase the number of red blood cells in your body.

Here are some things you can do to help yourself feel better if you develop anaemia:

- Get plenty of rest. Sleep more at night and take naps during the day if you can.
- Limit your activities: Do only the things that are most important to you.
- Don't be afraid to get help when you need it. Ask family and friends to pitch in with things like childcare, shopping, housework, or driving.
- Eat a well balanced diet.
- When sitting or lying down, get up slowly. This will help prevent dizziness.