

Alopecia During Cancer Treatment

If you have questions, ask your physician or nurse.

Alopecia is a condition that causes hair loss or thinning of the hair. It is a common, yet short-term, side effect of some cancer medicines. Alopecia can occur anywhere on the body and may happen after a few treatments.

Currently, there are no medications that can prevent hair loss during cancer treatment. Scalp hypothermia is a treatment that cools the scalp with cooling caps (cold caps) or ice packs. It is used before, during, and after each chemotherapy (chemo) treatment to try to slow and reduce the amount of hair loss.

Preparing for hair loss

Before chemo treatment starts, you might want to have your hair cut short. It will help you prepare mentally for the changes that you will see.

- If your hair is long enough, you might want to have a wig made from your own hair.
- Shop for a wig, toupee or turban before you start your treatments.

Talk to family and friends about how you feel. You can join a support group with people who are going through or have gone through the same thing.

Caring for your scalp

It is important to protect the skin on your scalp from cold, heat and the sun.

- Keep your scalp clean with a moisturizing shampoo and conditioner.
- Use gentle lotions or creams on your scalp when needed.
- Protect your scalp with sunscreen. Wear a hat, scarf or wig.

Managing hair loss

If you do lose your hair, it will usually grow back after the treatments are over. Sometimes, hair may grow back while you are still having treatments. It may grow back with a different texture or color.

- As your hair begins to grow back, limit the number of times you wash your hair to 2 times a week.
- Use a low heat setting when blow-drying your hair.
- Gently style your hair with soft brushes and wide-tooth combs.