

If you have any questions or concerns, please ask your doctor or nurse.

Alopecia During Cancer Treatment

What is Alopecia?

Alopecia (a-lo-PEE-shee-ah) is another word for 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 medicines that can prevent hair loss during cancer treatment.

How can I prepare for the changes that may occur?

Before 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, consider having a wig made from your own hair.
- Shop for a wig, toupee, or turban soon after your diagnosis.

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

What are some steps I can take to care for my scalp?

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

Will my hair grow back?

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, or
- With a different texture or color.

When my hair grows back, how should I take care of it?

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

Northwestern Medicine – Health Information Resources

For more information, contact Northwestern Memorial Hospital’s Alberto Culver Health Learning Center (HLC) at hlc@nm.org, or by calling 312.926.5465. You may also visit the HLC on the 3rd floor, Galter Pavilion at 251 E. Huron St., Chicago, IL. Health information professionals can help you find the information you need and provide you with personal support at no charge.

For more information about Northwestern Medicine, please visit our website at nm.org.

Para asistencia en español, por favor llamar al Departamento de Representantes para Pacientes al 312.926.3112.

The entities that come together as Northwestern Medicine are committed to representing the communities we serve, fostering a culture of inclusion, delivering culturally competent care, providing access to treatment and programs in a nondiscriminatory manner and eliminating healthcare disparities. For questions, please call either Northwestern Memorial Hospital’s Patient Representatives Department at 312.926.3112, TDD/TTY 312.926.6363, the Northwestern Lake Forest Patient Relations manager at 847.535.8282 and/or the Northwestern Medical Group Patient Representatives Department at 312.695.1100, TDD/TTY 312.926.6363.

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