

What to Do for Hair Loss

Some cancer treatments cause people to lose some or all of their hair. Hair usually grows back, and there are things you can do to make it less of a problem for you.



What causes hair loss in people with cancer?

Hair grows all the time, with old hairs falling out and new ones replacing them.

Many chemotherapy drugs damage growing hair, causing it to fall out. Some chemo drugs can cause hair thinning or hair loss on the scalp. Others also cause thinning or loss of pubic hair, arm and leg hair, eyebrows, or eyelashes. Radiation therapy to the head can also cause hair loss on the scalp.



Things you can do to prepare for hair loss

- Ask your cancer care team if hair loss is likely. If it is, ask if it will happen quickly or over time.
- Talk to your cancer care team about whether a cooling cap might help reduce your risk. More research is being done to learn whether cooling caps work and are safe. They can have some side effects, including headaches, scalp pain, and neck and shoulder discomfort. Talk to your cancer care team about the benefits, risks, and side effects of cooling caps.
- Wigs and other scalp coverings may be partially or fully covered by your health insurance. If so, ask your cancer care team for a wig prescription. The American Cancer Society “tlc” Tender Loving Care® program offers a variety of affordable wigs, hats, and scarves for people coping with cancer treatment that causes hair loss. The items can be purchased by visiting the “tlc”™ website at [tlcdirect.org](https://www.tlcdirect.org) or by calling **1-800-850-9445**.
- You might choose to cut your hair very short or even shave your head before it starts falling out.



Other things you can do when you have hair loss

- Your scalp may feel itchy or sensitive. Be gentle when brushing and washing your hair. Using a wide-toothed comb may help.
- Hair loss might be somewhat reduced by not brushing or pulling too much. Avoid making braids or ponytails, using rollers, blow drying, or using curling or flat irons.
- If your hair becomes very thin or is completely gone, be sure to protect the skin on your scalp from heat, cold, and sun. Use a broad-spectrum sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 30 and wear a hat. In cold weather, wear a hat or scarf to cover your head and stay warm.
- When new hair starts to grow, it may break easily at first. Avoid perms and dyes for the first few months. Keep your hair short and easy to style.
- When your hair starts to grow back, it may be a different texture or color. Over time, it will likely go back to the way it was before treatment.



Talk to your cancer care team.

Tell your cancer care team if you have trouble getting used to the hair loss so that you can get help.

For cancer information and answers, visit the American Cancer Society website at [cancer.org](https://www.cancer.org) or call us at **1-800-227-2345**. We're here when you need us.