

Managing Hair Loss

Why am I losing my hair?

Cancer treatments may cause hair loss (alopecia) by damaging hair follicles responsible for hair growth. This can change the way you look and feel about yourself. However, not all cancer treatments result in hair loss. If you are unsure if this is a side effect of your treatment, please talk to your care team.

This document outlines information and resources to help support your physical and emotional well being with hair loss.

What can I expect?

It is important to recognize that everybody's physical and emotional experience with hair loss will be different.

Hair loss is usually temporary, and the type and amount of hair loss depends on the treatment. It may start 1 to 3 weeks after the first treatment. You may completely lose your hair, or it may happen in patches. In other cases, hair loss may be gradual. For some people, their hair simply gets thin, dull, or dry. You may experience tenderness to your scalp as hair thins.

You may lose hair all over your body, including your head, face (eyelashes, eyebrows, and beard), arms, legs, underarms, and pelvic area. Hair loss is most noticeable when brushing or combing and often comes out in clumps, which can feel shocking and upsetting.

These changes may make you feel like a different or unfamiliar person and can bring feelings of grief and loss.

Will my hair grow back?

Your hair may begin to grow back 6 to 8 weeks after the last treatment. However, full regrowth can take several months. Some people notice hair growing back between treatments. When it does grow back, it may look or feel different, such as being curlier or greyer. Hair on different parts of your body may grow back at different times or in patches. Sometimes, ingrown hairs can happen. If this occurs talk to your healthcare team.

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What can I do?

Preparing Yourself

You may find the following tips helpful:

- Talk to a counselor or others who have experienced hair loss about what to expect.
- Talk about hair loss with friends and family, especially children, before it occurs so they are prepared.
- You may want to cut your hair with scissors or clippers. Do not use a razor as it may irritate your skin.
- Take a class on wigs, hair alternatives, skincare, or cosmetics. These can help you manage changes and connect with others who share similar experiences (see *Look Good Feel Better* below).
- If you are thinking about a wig, try to choose one before your hair loss starts. Ask your doctor for a prescription for “hair prosthesis” (wig). This may be covered by extended health benefits or claimed as a tax-deductible medical expense.
- When selecting a wig, bring a recent photo of your hair to help match your hair colour and style. Ask your hairdresser if they can style the wig for you.
- Choose soft, comfortable head coverings such as hats, scarves, or wigs.
- Speak with a dietitian about hair regrowth.

Caring for Yourself

The following tips may help you care for yourself during and after treatment:

- Be gentle with your hair. Use a mild shampoo, such as baby shampoo, a soft hairbrush, and either let your hair dry naturally or use a hair dryer on low heat.
- If you have thinning hair, avoid dyeing, perming, curling, or straightening your hair as these can make your hair dry and brittle.
- Keep your scalp moisturized. Gently massage it with an unscented hair or scalp oil.
- Protect your scalp and skin from the sun when outdoors. Wear a wide-brimmed hat or scarf, a lightweight long-sleeved shirt, and pants. Use a broad-spectrum sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 30. You may notice that the sun feels more intense than before.

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- Your head and neck may feel cooler without hair. Wear a soft hat or scarf to reduce the loss of body heat.
- Use a satin or satin-like pillowcase, or a satin-lined, cotton, or bamboo night cap. This can prevent hair from pulling while you sleep and help with temperature control.
- If you lose your eyelashes and eyebrows, protect your eyes from dust and grit by wearing glasses and a broad-rimmed hat.
- Be gentle with yourself. You are beautiful just as you are! Give yourself kind words and allow space for grief and affirmation.

Who can help?

If you have questions, please contact your health care team.

BC CANCER CENTRES	Provincial/Telephone Nurse Lines
Abbotsford	Call the 24/7 Provincial Nurse Line (PNL): 1-833-818-ONCO (6626)
Prince George	
Surrey	
Vancouver	
Victoria	
Kelowna	Between 8:30 am to 4:30 pm Monday to Friday (excluding Statutory holidays) call: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Telephone Nurse Line (250) 712-3944 or• 1-888-563-7773 ext. 683944

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BC Cancer Patient and Family Counseling Team

- Ask your care team for a referral or local contact number to set up an appointment.

Look Good Feel Better

www.lgfb.ca

- Join a supportive community and learn ways to manage the appearance-related effects of cancer.
- Take a class on wigs, hair alternatives, skincare, or cosmetics.

Canadian Cancer Society

www.cancer.ca

- Search the website for 'wig' to find information and an online form to order a wig from the free wig lending program.
- Search the website for 'hair loss' to find more helpful information.

InspireHealth

www.inspirehealth.ca

- Free online and in person nutrition and counseling supports.

Additional Nutrition Support

- HealthLink BC, call 8-1-1, to speak with a dietitian.

BC Cancer Website

www.bccancer.bc.ca

- Search the website for 'hair loss' to find more helpful information.
- Search the website for 'library' to find the Personal Appearance Pathfinder.

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Cold Caps and Cooling Systems

- Please refer to 'Using Cold Caps and Cooling Systems for Hair Loss at BC Cancer' handout on the BC Cancer 'Hair Loss and Appearance' website page.

Local Resources
