

Alopecia & Cancer

Chemotherapy and radiation therapy can cause hair loss (alopecia). Chemotherapy and radiation therapy target rapidly growing cells, including cancer cells and hair follicles.

People receiving chemotherapy may lose all of their hair, while people receiving radiation patients may lose hair only in the area that is being radiated. You may start losing your hair a few days or weeks after the start of treatment. Your hair will grow back 2-3 months after chemotherapy, and 3-6 months after radiation. Hair that grows back may have a different texture or color.



Losing your hair may be difficult for you. Talk about how you are feeling with friends and family. Consider joining a support group.

Not all chemotherapy drugs cause hair loss. Ask your doctor or nurse about the affects of your treatment on hair loss.

What to do:

- Talk with a friend or family about your hair loss.
- To help slow hair loss, use a gentle or baby shampoo after beginning treatment. Wash your hair using gentle movements across your scalp.
- Consider cutting your hair short prior to losing your hair. Losing short pieces of hair can be a less dramatic change than losing long strands of hair.
- Use a satin pillowcase when sleeping.
- Wear hats, scarves, head wraps, or wigs as desired, to preserve body warmth, protect your scalp, and add style.
- Wear sunscreen if you are not wearing a head covering while outside.
- Attend a Look Good...Feel Better class sponsored by the American Cancer Society office in Denver (303.758.2030). Ask the staff for locations and times when the classes are offered.

- Pick out a wig at one of the American Cancer Society Cancer Resource Centers in the Denver Metro area.
- Ask your nurse about additional resources including wig salons.
- The American Cancer Society sponsors these wig programs:
 - Dorcy Center at St. Mary-Corwin Medical Center
 - Durango Cancer Resource Center
 - Exempla Lutheran Medical Center
 - Grand Junction Wig Program
 - Greeley Wig Program
 - Medical Center of Aurora
 - Memorial Hospital, University of Colorado Health
 - Penrose Cancer Center
 - Rocky Mountain Cancer Center at Boulder Community Hospital
 - Rose Medical Center
 - Sky Ridge Medical Center
 - Swedish Medical Center
 - Valley View Hospital, Calaway-Young Cancer Center

Visit our website for more information about support groups, clinical trials and lifestyle information.

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NOTE: This information is provided to you as an educational service of National Jewish Health. It is not meant to be a substitute for consulting with your own physician.

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