



Alopecia (al-o-pee-sha) is the medical name for hair loss. With alopecia, some or all of your hair can fall out.

Who gets hair loss?

Many people who have cancer treatment have hair loss. It can happen with some chemotherapy, radiotherapy and targeted therapies.

Not everyone who has cancer treatment loses their hair.

Why does it happen?

These cancer treatments damage cells that divide rapidly. This includes cells in the hair follicles that produce hair. Damage to these cells can make hair fall out.

How much hair will I lose?

The amount of hair you lose depends on the treatment you have.

Radiotherapy

People having radiotherapy alone will only lose hair on the part of the body being treated. However, the amount of hair you lose will depend on:

- the dose of radiotherapy
- the number of treatments you have
- and if you are having chemotherapy at the same time.

Some people can lose all the hair in this area. Others may get thinning or patchy hair loss.

Chemotherapy or targeted therapies

The amount of hair loss depends on the drug and dose taken. Some people can lose all the hair on their head and body. Others may get thinning or patchy hair loss.

When will it happen?

This also depends on the treatment you have.

Radiotherapy

Depending on the dose, hair loss often starts around 1 to 4 weeks from the start of treatment. Hair may keep falling out for 2-3 weeks after treatment.

Chemotherapy or targeted therapies

Hair usually starts to fall out 2 to 3 weeks after the start of treatment. With some drugs it can happen later, or even after treatment.

Will my hair grow back?

When treatment is finished, hair follicle cells can usually repair themselves and hair will grow back.

It usually starts to grow back 3 to 6 months after treatment is finished. When it does grow back, it may be curlier, straighter or a different colour.

For some people who have had radiotherapy, their hair may never grow back in the area where treatment was given.

If your hair falls out, protect your head from:

- the sun by applying sunscreen and/or wearing a hat
- If you are having radiotherapy to the brain, head or neck, check with your doctor, nurse or radiation therapist before you use sunscreen on your scalp.

Tips to manage hair loss

Planning for hair loss

- Prepare your family and friends (especially children) by telling them you may lose your hair.
- Choose a wig or hairpiece before your hair falls out if you want to match it to your normal hair colour or style.
- Get your hair cut short before it starts to fall out.
- Have your head shaved (using electric clippers) if your hair starts to fall out in large amounts. Be careful not to cut your scalp.
- You may feel tingling, tenderness or heat when your hair is falling out.
- If you are having radiotherapy to your brain, head, or neck region, tell your doctor, nurse or radiation therapist **before** you cut or shave your hair.

Protecting your scalp

- Protect your head from the cold by wearing a hat, turban, scarf or wig.
- Protect your scalp from sun damage by applying sunscreen (SPF 30 or above) and wearing a hat, turban or scarf while outside. If you are having radiotherapy to the brain, head or neck, check with your doctor, nurse or radiation therapist before you use sunscreen on your scalp.
- Moisturise your scalp twice daily to reduce dryness:
 - Use a simple non-perfumed moisturiser, like sorbolene cream.
 - If you are having radiotherapy, check with the team at your treatment centre about what moisturiser to use, and don't apply it during the 2 to 3 hours before treatment.

Eye care

- Some chemotherapy can make your eyebrows and eyelashes fall out.
- These are important for protecting your eyes.
- Losing your eyelashes increases your chance of getting an eye infection.
- Talk with your doctor or nurse about eye care if you lose your eyebrows or eyelashes.

Hair loss and body image

Losing your hair may change the way you feel about yourself. This is called your body image.



Look Good, Feel Better

Talk with your doctor or nurse about the Look Good Feel Better program for people affected by cancer.

See the website: www.lgfb.org.au



Things to ask your doctor, nurse or radiation therapist

- Will my treatment cause hair loss?
- When will this happen?
- How much hair will I lose?
- How should I care for my skin or scalp if I lose my hair?
- Where can I hire or buy wigs and hairpieces?
- Are there any support groups where I can talk with others who have hair loss from cancer treatment?

Contact numbers:

Daytime:

Night/weekend: