

Hair Loss Service for patients having cancer treatment

Information for Patients

Leaflet number: 659 Version: 14

Produced: June 2025 Review: Jun 2028

Introduction

Many people feel their hair is important to their appearance and self-image. Losing your hair can be a distressing experience, and some patients feel anxious when they find out they have cancer that may require treatment, that will affect their hair.

The aim of this booklet is:

- to try to answer some of the questions you may have about hair loss and how it may affect you.
- to try to help you make the best of your appearance during this time.

What are some of the causes of hair loss?

Some treatments for cancer, such as certain chemotherapy drugs and radiotherapy, may cause you to lose your hair.

Hair loss during chemotherapy treatment

Chemotherapy uses anti-cancer drugs to destroy cancer cells. Unfortunately, these drugs also damage healthy cells, including the cells in the hair follicles which is why you may lose your hair.

Many people assume that chemotherapy always causes hair loss but this is not true. Certain drugs do cause partial or complete hair loss, but some drugs cause none at all. If the drugs included in your treatment plan will result in you losing your hair, the doctors and nurses looking after you will explain this to you. If you have any questions, do not hesitate to ask them.

Hair loss may start within a couple of days of beginning treatment or may not occur for some weeks. You will probably notice more hair on your brush, in the basin or shower after washing your hair or on your bed linen. Some people notice that their scalp becomes quite tender just before their hair comes out.

**Health information and support is available at www.nhs.uk
or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice**

Visit www.leicestershospitals.nhs.uk for maps and information about visiting Leicester's Hospitals
To give feedback about this information sheet, contact InformationForPatients@uhl-tr.nhs.uk

You may also lose your body hair including underarm and pubic hair. If you lose your eyebrows and eyelashes your eyes may water more easily and be more sensitive to the sun. Wearing sunglasses will help to protect your eyes.

Is there any way I can stop my hair falling out?

Scalp cooling is a method of preventing hair loss due to chemotherapy but it can only be used with certain drugs. Success depends on the dose of the drug and whether other drugs are given at the same time.

The procedure uses a cold cap to lower the temperature of the top of your head. The cold narrows the blood vessels and prevents the drug passing into the cells at your hair root and damaging them.

Please ask your doctor if scalp cooling can be used with your chemotherapy, and ask for more information if it is appropriate for you. You can then decide whether or not to try it.

Hair care during chemotherapy treatment

When we are unwell or below par we often notice our hair does not have the same bounce or condition as usual.

Whatever treatment you are receiving take care of your hair and treat it as gently as possible. Chemotherapy in particular may cause your hair to become dry and brittle even if you do not lose it.

We recommend the following:

- Use a mild shampoo.
- Limit the number of times you wash your hair to twice a week, if possible.
- Use tepid, not hot water.
- Pat your hair dry using a soft towel - do not rub it.
- Use a wide-toothed comb or a soft hairbrush.
- Do not be afraid to brush or comb your hair daily but remember to do it gently.
- Use ribbons to tie back hair rather than elastic, which can easily damage the hair.
- Do not plait your hair as this may damage it.
- Do not use harsh chemicals, such as hair dyes, perms, gels and sprays.
- Do not use any heat, for example heated rollers, hair dryers or hair tongs/straighteners.

Hair loss and radiotherapy

Radiotherapy causes hair loss in a different way to chemotherapy and only affects the specific area being treated. You will only lose the hair on your head if your head is being treated.

Although hair loss is usually temporary for a few people it can be permanent. It depends on the dose of radiotherapy and the length of treatment you receive. If your hair loss is likely to be permanent this will be explained to you before treatment begins.

During treatment your skin may become sore, similar to mild sun burn and it is important not to make it worse. The staff in the radiotherapy department will give you advice about how to care for your skin in the area being treated at the beginning of your course of radiotherapy. The staff will also give you advice about how to look after your hair. If you feel unsure of what to do or which products to use do not hesitate to ask the staff looking after you.

Hair loss and immunotherapy

Generally immunotherapy drugs do not cause hair loss, they may however cause hair thinning. Please feel free to discuss this with your Immunotherapy Nurse Specialist.

Will my hair regrow after cancer treatment?

Your hair will usually grow back when treatment is finished. The time regrowth will take depends on your treatment. Your doctor or nurse will be able to advise you on how long it will take.

Your scalp may itch more than usual while your hair is regrowing, so use a mild moisturising shampoo. Your hair may grow back slightly differently, for example a different shade or colour, curlier than before or very straight.

How do I get referred to the service?

Referrals can be made by your consultant, Clinical Nurse Specialist (Keyworker) or by a nurse on the ward or in the clinic you are attending.

Hair Loss Service

The University Hospitals of Leicester (UHL) NHS Trust Hair Loss Service is based in the Macmillan Information and Support Centre, Ground Floor, Osborne Building, Leicester Royal Infirmary, LE1 5WW

The service is available on a Monday morning and all day Wednesday

Telephone: 0116 258 6189

We aim to supply a wide range of wigs as quickly as possible. In this way we can offer a similar, or better, service than most non-NHS wig shops, at much more competitive prices. For information on NHS wig charges please contact the Macmillan Information and Support Centre.

You must have an appointment to choose and have your wig fitted. We can only provide wigs at NHS charges if you have been referred to the service by a UHL consultant or other health care professional.

If you wish to purchase a wig privately no referral is needed but you will require an appointment. **Private consultations will have an additional consultation fee and cost of wig on request.**

You can be assured of an expert consultation in a private room and in a relaxed atmosphere. If you wish to bring someone with you they are welcome.

How much will my wig cost?

Wigs supplied to patients through the NHS wig service are subject to a charge payable by the patient. NHS charges are reviewed on April 1st each year and we can provide you with details of current charges. Please note that we are only able to accept payment by card or cash.

You can get **free** wigs if you are receiving certain benefits. Please see the attached leaflet for details of these.

Please note: you will not be able to take your wig home until we have seen evidence that you are entitled to free (or reduced cost) wigs.

Please note: when you receive your wig you will be given a copy of our returns policy and care instructions. Please read carefully.

Frequently asked questions

Will my wig fall off?

There is an adjustable band inside each wig to ensure a secure fit so your wig should not fall off.

Alternatively if you have not lost all your hair or if it has started to grow back you can use hair clips to help to secure your wig.

Will I lose my body hair?

This depends on the type of illness you have or the treatment you are receiving. Please ask a member of your healthcare team about this.

If you do lose your body hair there are various things you can do to maintain your normal appearance, such as pencilled or synthetic eyebrows and synthetic eye lashes. Please ask the hair loss advisor for more details.

Should I have my hair cut before it comes out?

You may find it less of a shock when you lose your hair if you have already had it cut into a short style. However you may prefer to leave it in your normal style.

What if I do not want to wear my wig all the time?

There are many alternatives to a wig such as hats, headscarves or bandanas.

You will probably find that cotton headscarves stay in place more easily than silk ones.

A selection of headwear items is available from the Macmillan Information and Support Centre in the Osborne Building.



Other sources of information

Macmillan Cancer Support

Telephone: 0808 808 00 00

Website: www.macmillan.org.uk

8am-8pm 7 days per week

Look Good Feel Better

Website: www.lookgoodfeelbetter.co.uk

Cancer Hair Care

Website: www.cancerhaircare.co.uk

Help with Health Costs

Website: www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/help-with-health-costs/wigs-and-fabric-supports-on-the-nhs/

Help with Health Costs– HC11

Website: www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk

اگر آپ کو یہ معلومات کسی اور زبان میں درکار ہیں، تو براہ کرم مندرجہ ذیل نمبر پر ٹیلی فون کریں۔
على هذه المعلومات بلغةٍ أخرى، الرجاء الاتصال على رقم الهاتف الذي يظهر في الأسفل

જો તમને અન્ય ભાષામાં આ માહિતી જોઈતી હોય, તો નીચે આપેલ નંબર પર કૃપા કરી ટેલિફોન કરો

ਜੇ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿਚ ਚਾਹੁੰਦੇ ਹੋ, ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਹੇਠਾਂ ਦਿੱਤੇ ਗਏ ਨੰਬਰ 'ਤੇ ਟੈਲੀਫੋਨ ਕਰੋ।

Aby uzyskać informacje w innym języku, proszę zadzwonić pod podany niżej numer telefonu

Previous reference:

If you would like this information in another language or format such as EasyRead or Braille, please telephone 0116 250 2959 or email equality@uhl-tr.nhs.uk