

Hair Care for People of Color With Cancer

Hair loss can have a significant impact on a person's sense of identity and self-esteem. For many, hair can have deep cultural meaning in how it is styled, as a symbol of resilience, spirituality, and more. This fact sheet discusses:

- **Why hair loss occurs during some cancer treatments**
- **Tips for taking care of your scalp and hair**
- **Cold capping and scalp cooling**
- **Why your emotions are valid**



What Happens to Hair During Cancer Treatment

Chemotherapy and radiation therapy kill fast-growing cancer cells. However, these treatments can also target fast-growing cells in the body, including hair follicles, where hair develops and grows, potentially causing hair loss.

Another temporary condition that can also develop is *Chemotherapy Induced Alopecia* (CIA), or hair thinning. Talk to your health care team about what to expect during treatment and guidance in managing hair loss.



Tips Throughout Treatment

Hair loss usually starts one to three weeks after chemotherapy. Below are some tips you can follow that may help reduce hair loss.

Stop chemical treatments and be gentle – Postpone relaxers, dyes, heat styling and other hair treatments. Products with alcohol or menthol can dry out your hair. Consider using wide-toothed combs which tug less than other hair tools.

Use moisturizing products – Moisturizing shampoos, conditioners and mild oils or lotions including coconut oil and shea butter can relieve a dry scalp. Be gentle as you carefully wash your hair and scalp.

Reduce stress on hair – Avoid tight hair clips, barrettes, elastic bands, ponytails or extensions that pull at the roots. Sleep with a hair net or use a satin or silk pillowcase to reduce friction and wrap your head in light fabric to keep hair in place.

Accentuate your overall appearance – You can look great even without hair! Natural makeup and vibrant clothes can enhance your other features and boost confidence. If you lose your eyelashes or eyebrows, try pencils and liners that match your natural color.

Use head coverings and wigs – Preparing a wig with a salon before losing your hair will closely match your hair color and texture. You may also consider turbans, scarves, or wraps in a wide range of styles.

CancerCare's *Wig Clinic* empowers women to look and feel their best during treatment. Individual 30-minute fittings are available with an oncology social worker present to provide support in our New York, New Jersey and Connecticut offices.



Cold Caps and Scalp Cooling

Cold capping, or scalp-cooling, is a way of reducing hair loss during chemotherapy. A tightly fitted, very cold cap constricts the blood vessels in the scalp. This reduces the amount of chemotherapy treatment reaching the hair follicles.

Unfortunately, cold capping was first developed for straight or wavy hair. It has not yet been proven to be entirely effective for people of color and results are mixed. Inclusive studies are underway to improve how it works for everyone.

Discuss this with your health care team and with a knowledgeable stylist to see what works best for you.



Handling Your Emotions

The possibility of hair loss may cause stress and anxiety. Know that you are not alone and that your emotional reactions are valid.

- **Give yourself time**
- **Hair loss does not change who you are**
- **Your health is important**
- **This may likely be temporary**
- **Support is available**

Some people consider refusing chemotherapy due to fears of losing their hair. This is not unusual, but considering the options for your health and circumstances can inform your decisions.

Oncology Social Workers are available to talk with you and provide support. Support Groups are another option for connection and guidance that can validate your experience. Contact CancerCare's *Hope Line* to learn more at 800-813-HOPE (4673).

CancerCare® Can Help

For over 80 years, CancerCare has empowered millions of people affected by cancer through free counseling, resource navigation, support groups, educational resources, advocacy and direct financial assistance. Our oncology social workers improve the lives of people diagnosed with cancer, caregivers, survivors and the bereaved, by addressing their emotional, practical and financial challenges.

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