

ACCORD HOSPICE

Registered Charity No SC013682



Coping with Hair Loss

**Information
For
Patients & Relatives**

INTRODUCTION

Hair Loss

Alopecia or hair loss is a common and distressing side effect of cancer treatments such as chemotherapy and radiotherapy. Hair loss can range from a gradual thinning to complete rapid onset baldness - affecting not only the scalp but also hair on other parts of the body such as eyelashes, nasal hair, eyebrows underarm and pubic hair.

Impact of Hair Loss

How we perceive ourselves is often influenced by how we look. For some people hair loss may not pose any problems but for others it can impact on their confidence, attractiveness to others or sexuality. It can also lower self esteem, give a poorer body image and reduce quality of life. Dealing with hair loss can be traumatic; not just for the patient but also for family and friends who do not know how to cope or help at such a difficult time.

This booklet has been written to answer questions you may have and also give you some practical tips and advice on dealing with hair loss, which we hope both men and women will find helpful.



Why does chemotherapy cause hair loss?

Not all chemotherapy drugs cause hair loss, depending on the drug and dose used will depend on the extent of the hair loss. Some will cause no hair loss; some cause thinning and others total hair loss. Because anticancer drugs don't discriminate between the cells they destroy, they often kill normal cells, like those in hair follicles, resulting in rapid hair loss. Unlike cancer cells the healthy cells recover and your hair will grow back once your treatment is finished. This loss can occur on all parts of the body — scalp, face, arms, legs, underarms, and pubic areas.

Radiotherapy and Hair Loss

Radiotherapy treats cancer cells by using high-energy rays which destroy the cancer cells. Unlike chemotherapy, radiotherapy is directed to the specific area, resulting in hair loss only in that area.

Can hair loss be prevented during chemotherapy treatment?

There is no known way to prevent chemotherapy-induced hair loss. However there is a procedure known as scalp cooling that involves wearing a cold cap. Some hospitals have different methods of scalp cooling but generally means you are fitted with a cooled, gel filled cap which freezes the blood in the hair follicles, preventing the chemotherapy reaching the follicles, it is fitted up to half an hour before chemotherapy starts and left on for up to two hours afterwards. There is no guarantee it will prevent hair loss and can be an uncomfortable experience; extending your appointment time. To find out if this technique is suitable for you just ask your nurse or doctor.

Preparing for hair loss

You might like to have your hair cut shorter, particularly if your hair is long, hair loss can be gradual and having it shed around you can be distressing. Wearing a turban or scarf will help to collect the hair and prevent it from sticking to your clothes or pillow.

Around the tenth day after your first chemotherapy start to wash your hair over the sink or bath, rather than in the shower or when bathing. The weight of the water will pull on the hair and having it in your bath water or on your body can be distressing. Some people prefer to shave their heads completely. This can give a sense of control and help ease the distress.

Use a wide-toothed comb and comb gently. If you experience tenderness a baby brush can be useful. Change to using mild hair products, such as baby shampoo or Simple products. Your body may react to heavily perfumed products during chemotherapy.

How quickly will I lose my hair?

Hair loss is not always immediate; it can be as long as two or three weeks after your first treatment and in some cases it doesn't happen till nearer the end of treatment.

Loss of body hair

You may lose your eyebrows, eyelashes, nasal and pubic hair. It is advisable to carry a tissue as the loss of nasal hair will result in the feeling of a "runny nose". A brow pencil can be used to pencil in brows and you may prefer to use false eyelashes, it is advisable to consult a beauty therapist for this.

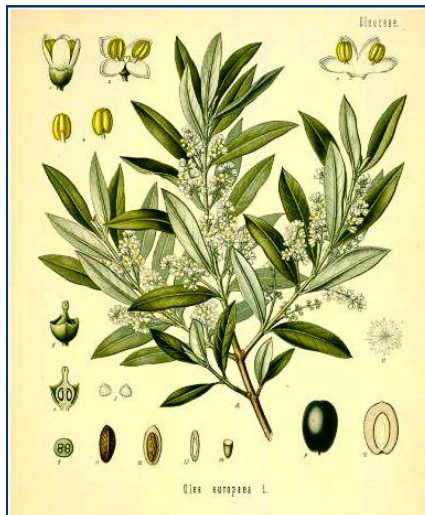
Scalp Care

It is important to continue washing your scalp after hair loss has happened, our skin is constantly renewing itself, washing your scalp regularly helps to get rid of the dead skin, preventing a build up and flakiness.

Moisturising

Olive oil is an excellent moisturiser, it is natural and unperfumed, therefore will not irritate your scalp. Massaging the olive oil into your scalp will help stimulate the blood flow to the hair follicles; it is a good idea to do this before bedtime, leaving the oil on overnight. (Brushing your scalp with a baby brush before applying olive oil can be soothing and is a good way of exfoliating your scalp). Wearing a cotton turban or head covering will prevent the oil transferring onto your pillows.

Being on chemotherapy can make your skin more sensitive to sunlight as well as not having hair to protect your scalp therefore it is advisable, during the summer months, to protect your scalp with a sunscreen.



Head Coverings

Wigs

Wigs are available in many styles and colours and are very natural looking. It may take you time to get used to wearing it but once you do, it should feel comfortable.

Everyone is entitled to a prescription for a wig, whether you pay the prescription charge or not will depend on your financial circumstances. You will be given a prescription for a wig from the hospital you are attending.

There will be a choice of suppliers you can go to, you can make appointments with them all and choose which one you are happiest with. You might like to choose a wig before hair loss starts, if you want to match your present style and colour. If hair loss has already started, take along a photograph to give the fitter an idea of what you want. You may want to take the opportunity to try a completely different colour or style from your usual one, don't be afraid to ask!

This can be an emotional time for you and can be good to take someone who knows you well and that will be honest. You don't have to make a decision straight away; you can go back when you are ready.



Caring For Your Wig

Brushing and Styling

If you have not purchased a brush with your wig, a firm brush or wide tooth comb can be used. Brush or comb gently into desired style, take care not to brush your wig too flat as this can make it look unnatural.



Washing

Brush gently and thoroughly before placing in some tepid water containing wig shampoo or a mild baby shampoo. Do not rub. After a few minutes, rinse with tepid water. Place in a towel and fold to help remove excess water.

Do not brush or comb your wig when wet.

Your wig should be left to dry naturally on a wig stand or placed on top of a tall aerosol tin or bottle.

Once completely dry, can be brushed or combed back into style.

General Care

Keep your wig away from heat i.e., ovens, candles, lighters, matches and cigarettes.

Do not be tempted to use a hairdryer, tongs, straighteners or heated rollers, these items will burn your wig as it is made from synthetic materials.

Wigs are trimmed using special scissors; seek professional help if this is required.

Hair colour or perm lotion should not be used on your wig.



Alternative Head Coverings

You may find you prefer not to wear a wig, but as we lose most of our body heat through our head sometimes a light head covering is needed especially at night or in the colder weather.

Hats

Hats are a good alternative and are a popular fashion accessory available in many different styles. Shop around and try on different styles, you should find something to suit.

Scarves

Headscarves are another good choice. They come in many different sizes and materials. Scarves can be tied in many different ways and you can add accessories to suit your taste. Cotton material is the most comfortable to wear, silk and satin tend to slip easily and man made fibers can cause your head to sweat.

Turbans

Turbans are also available in many styles and materials, terry cotton turbans are especially good for night time and are comfortable to sleep in.

You will find all of the above in department stores, accessory stores, and wig suppliers and on many websites.



Colouring And Perming

If you have been colouring your hair for a long period of time, you may not be too sure what your natural colour is and may be keen to start colouring again. It is advisable to wait at least 3 - 6 months from the end of your treatment before having this done again, depending on the condition of your hair.

Always consult a professional hairdresser when you feel you are ready to have a perm or colour. A skin test is also recommended.

There are lots of coloured mousses and vegetable dyes available and can be used until your hair is ready for a permanent colour.

Coping With Confidence

Many people find dealing with hair loss the most difficult part of their treatment. We often use hair to describe how we look; forming an identity, therefore it is common to feel a sense of grief as hair loss begins.

Talking to family and friends about it will help, quite often other people will avoid talking about it in fear of upsetting you, once you start to talk about it this will ease and they will find it easier to offer you the support you need. You may be worried about telling your children, but children will worry more if they feel something's being hidden from them. A simple explanation is usually best.

Remember you are not alone and throughout your treatment you will meet many women and men with the same worries and fears. Your nurse should be able to advise you of what support services are available in your area.

Turning Heads

How Turning Heads Can Help

At ACCORD Hospice, we can offer you practical advice and support in a private, dignified, caring environment.

Not only is this support available to you, but also to your family or friends wishing to help you.

We will show you how to use jewellery, scarves and hats in a creative way to suit your personality, both for everyday use and for those special occasions when something extra special is needed. We will also offer information on further resources that are available and skin and hair advice. A Turning Heads Information CD is also available.

How to Access Turning Heads

You may self refer to this service. In order to spend time with you, an appointment system is used.



Suggestions Comments & Complaints

If you have any suggestions, comments or complaints about how the service can be improved, please speak to Michelle Gallagher.

If you are not satisfied with the response, please discuss your concerns directly with the Chief Executive at ACCORD Hospice:

Mrs. Helen Simpson
0141 581 2000

Should you feel that your complaint has not been resolved by ACCORD Hospice, you may contact Healthcare Improvement Scotland (HIS) directly, at any stage:

Adrian Masson
Head of Corporate Services
Healthcare Improvement Scotland
Elliott House
8 - 10 Hillside Crescent
EDINBURGH
EH7 5EA

Telephone: 0131 623 4300
Email: adrian.masson@nhs.net

**If required this leaflet is available in
other languages & formats**



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