



CANCER
INFAMILY
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HAIR LOSS/THINNING

This leaflet is about hair loss/thinning/weakening, which is a common result of chemotherapy.

Ask your doctor if you are at risk of it.

THE RECOMMENDATIONS IN THIS LEAFLET SHOULD NEVER REPLACE THOSE OF THE DOCTOR/ONCOLOGIST WHO CLOSELY FOLLOWS YOUR CASE.

Hair loss / thinning

Hair loss and/or thinning and weakening due to chemotherapy is usually temporary.

Some (but not all) chemo or hormonal therapies cause hair loss (alopecia). How much hair is lost depends on the patient and the treatment.

Hair loss and/or thinning and weakening due to chemotherapy is usually temporary. Chemotherapy causes hair loss because its chemicals enter the bloodstream reaching everywhere in body, including hair roots. If the roots are affected during a growing phase, when they are particularly susceptible, the hair stops growing, weakens and can fall. However, hair loss is never uniform because its growth/rest stage varies throughout the scalp. Patients can also experience hair loss from eyelashes, eyebrows, legs, arms or pubic area.



Hair loss can be very stressful, but remember that it is almost always temporary, and once treatment ends the hair will grow back.

Sometimes, for a while after therapy, the hair can grow with a totally different color or texture. This occurs because the drugs stay in the system for a period, although exactly how they change the way hair grows is still not understood. The best-known example is the so called “chemo curl” - when a person’s straight hair grows very curly after chemotherapy. Nevertheless, as toxins are eliminated and the body recovers, your hair will go back to its normal self.

Hair loss can be upsetting, but there are ways to help you cope:

- ✘ Treat your hair gently - use mild shampoos and conditioners. Use baby products. Wash the hair less often, and do it carefully.
- ✘ Dry your hair by gently pressing it with a soft towel.

- ✘ Use a wide-toothed comb, or a soft-bristles brush. You can also comb your hair with your fingers, using wet hands.
- ✘ Do not use hair dryers, irons, or products such as gels or clips that may hurt your scalp. Use the lowest temperature option if you have to use the dryer.
- ✘ Use a hairnet, turban or scarf to help with hair loss.
- ✘ Use a satin pillowcase to reduce hair tangling.
- ✘ Tell your hairdresser that you are having chemotherapy. He(s)he should know the right products for your situation. You should not dye or chemically curl your hair, although natural dyes can be used.
- ✘ You might want to think about cutting your hair short. Shorter hairstyles make the hair look stronger and bulkier and its loss less noticeable.
- ✘ Do not use hooks, indentations or hair elastics, braids, ponytail or other ways to pick up hair.
- ✘ If you lose your hair, keep your head covered in the summer, or use a sunscreen to avoid exposure to the sun. In the cold, wear a hat, scarf or turban to prevent heat loss and dryness of the scalp.
- ✘ Sometimes when hair regrows, the scalp can become extra sensitive, dry and cranky. It helps if when washing it you use a moisturizing shampoo and conditioner. Also try to gently massage the scalp.



Should I cover my head?

Some people who lose all or part of the hair feel better wearing hats, scarves, turbans or wigs. Others prefer their heads uncovered. Others still do both, depending on whether they are in public, or at home with family or friends.

Hats, scarves and turbans are comfortable and allow you to experiment with different looks. Wigs on the other hand can make you look like you still have your own hair. Or allow you to try that new color or look you always wanted.

If you decide to go for a wig similar to your hair:

- ✘ Buy the wig before the treatment starts, so you can pick one as close as possible to your natural hair color, texture and style. If you already started chemo, use a recent photo and a piece of your natural hair to match the wig.
- ✘ Look for a list of places where you can buy wigs. Charities that support cancer patients usually carry these lists.
- ✘ Your wig might be fully or partially covered by your health insurance or service if prescribed by your doctor. Be sure you check the conditions for reimbursement.



PATIENT INFORMATION LEAFLETS ARE NOT MEANT TO REPLACE THE INFORMATION, ADVICE AND SUPPORT PROVIDED BY YOUR DOCTOR

Sources: American Cancer Society, Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, Mayo Clinic and recent research papers / **Scientific Review:** Maria Rita Dionísio, Médica Oncologista, Fundação Champalimaud / **Content:** Susana Lamas, Catarina Amorim / **Project coordination:** Filipe Santos Silva / **Design:** www.estudiorjdesign.com / **Illustrations:** www.zecardoso.com/ / **Project by:** Public Awareness of Cancer Unit, IPATIMUP October 2018 / **+ info:** www.cancronafamilia.org