

# MANAGING CHEMOTHERAPY SIDE EFFECTS

## HAIR LOSS (*ALOPECIA: al-o-pee-she-a*)

**These are general guidelines only and are not intended to replace talking with your health care providers. Be sure to tell your doctor or nurse about any side effects that you notice.**

### **Why will my hair fall out?**

Chemotherapy can harm the cells that make hair. This means that hair on your head and anywhere on your body (eyelashes, eyebrows, armpits, pubic areas and other body hair) may fall out. Loss of facial and body hair is usually less severe, because hair grows less actively in these areas than on the scalp. Hair loss is a common side effect of chemotherapy, but it is important to know that not all drugs cause hair loss. Some drugs may only cause your hair to thin or your hair loss might be confined to one place on your body like your head. The amount of hair and where you lose it depends on the type of chemotherapy treatment you receive.

In most cases, hair loss is temporary.

### **When will my hair start to fall out?**

Your hair may start to fall out 2 to 3 weeks after chemotherapy begins. Sometimes your hair will start to grow back during chemotherapy treatment. This does not mean the treatment has stopped working. Hair loss may continue for about one month after your last chemotherapy treatment. Most of the time, your hair will grow back after treatments have ended.

### **What will happen when I lose my hair?**

Hair loss usually begins 10 to 14 days after starting treatment. The hair can fall out quickly, in clumps, or gradually. You may notice hair on your pillow, clothes, in your hairbrush or in the shower drain. You will continue to lose your hair while you are receiving treatment. This may go on for about one month after your treatment. Your scalp may also feel tingly, sore, or tender because of the cancer treatment. These feelings are temporary.

### **What can I do before my hair falls out?**

- Treat your hair gently. Pat it dry with a soft towel. Wash your hair and scalp with lukewarm water and only when necessary. Use colourless, scent-free shampoos that are pH balanced (5.5). Dove® unscented is one example. Use a hair conditioner to keep your hair from tangling.

- Some people choose to cut their hair short.
- Some people shave their head. If you do shave your head, use an electric shaver that won't cut your scalp.
- If you plan to buy a wig or hairpiece, get one while you still have hair. This way you can match it to the colour of your hair. Gently used wigs are available free of charge at the Lodge. Ask your nurse about obtaining a wig.

### **What should I do after my hair falls out?**

- Protect your head from the sun. Use sunscreen (Sun Protection Factor (SPF) 15) or wear a hat when you are outside.
- Protect your head from the cold. Wear a hat or scarf.
- Try wearing a soft scarf, hair net when you sleep or sleep on a satin pillowcase
- Ask your nurse about getting a new turban; these have been donated to the cancer centre for your use.

### **How can I cope with hair loss?**

Hair loss can be very emotionally upsetting for both men and women. It is a side effect to cancer treatment that is the most visible to others. The support of family and friends may help you maintain a positive attitude. Talk with your health care team about your feelings and concerns; they are there to help you.

Women can attend a free workshop called "Look Good Feel Better." This workshop shows techniques to hide appearance related side effects of chemotherapy and radiation therapy. Wigs and other alternatives are demonstrated. Registration is required because space is limited. Call 613- 542-2826 to register for a workshop. The workshops are usually held once a month at the Lodge.

### **When will my hair grow back?**

It takes your hair about four to six weeks to start growing after you have finished your chemotherapy treatment. The hair grows back about a quarter of an inch or five millimeters every month. Sometimes your new hair can be curlier or straighter – or even a different colour. After six months to a year, it may go back to how it was before your treatment.

### **How do I look after my new hair?**

Avoid perming or bleaching your new hair for six months. Do not brush your hair too much. Be careful not to pull on the hair, braiding your hair or putting your hair in a ponytail. It is best not to use electric rollers, hair dryers and curling irons on your hair.

