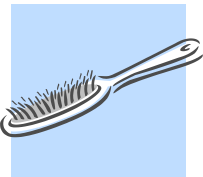


## Hair Loss



### **What it is:**

Hair loss (also called *alopecia*) is when some or all of your hair falls out.

### **Why it occurs:**

Radiation therapy can cause hair loss because it damages cells that grow quickly, such as those in your hair roots.

Hair loss from radiation therapy *only happens on the part of your body being treated*. This is not the same as hair loss from chemotherapy, which happens all over your body. For instance, you may lose some or all of the hair on your head when you get radiation to your brain. But if you get radiation to your hip, you may lose pubic hair (between your legs) but not the hair on your head.

### **How long it lasts**

You may start losing hair in your treatment area 2 to 3 weeks after your first radiation therapy session. It takes about a week for all the hair in your treatment area to fall out. Your hair may grow back 3 to 6 months after treatment is over. Sometimes, though, the dose of radiation is so high that your hair never grows back.

Once your hair starts to grow back, it may not look or feel the way it did before. Your hair may be thinner, or curly instead of straight. Or it may be darker or lighter in color than it was before.

### **Ways to manage hair loss on your head**

#### **Before hair loss:**

- **Decide whether to cut your hair or shave your head.** You may feel more in control of hair loss when you plan ahead. Use an electric razor to prevent nicking yourself if you decide to shave your head.

- **If you plan to buy a wig, do so while you still have hair.** First, check with your physician to determine if it is likely that the hair loss be extensive enough that you'll want a wig. If so, the best time to select your wig is before radiation therapy begins or soon after it starts. This way, the wig will match the color and style of your own hair. Some people take their wig to their hair stylist. You will want to have your wig fitted once you have lost your hair. Make sure to choose a wig that feels comfortable and does not hurt your scalp. Typically, the wig should not be worn during radiation treatments as the scalp may be red or irritated, and the wig can make it worse. The wig can be worn after the scalp redness/soreness resolves, which may take 2-6 weeks after completion of radiation.
- **Check with your health insurance company to see whether it will pay for your wig.** If it does not, you can deduct the cost of your wig as a medical expense on your income taxes. Some groups also sponsor free wig banks. Ask your doctor, nurse, or social worker if he or she can refer you to a free wig bank in your area.
- **Be gentle when you wash your hair.** Use a mild shampoo, such as a baby shampoo. Dry your hair by patting (not rubbing) it with a soft towel.
- **Do not use** curling irons, electric hair dryers, curlers, hair bands, clips, or hair sprays. These can hurt your scalp or cause early hair loss.
- **Do not use** products that are harsh on your hair. These include hair colors, perms, gels, mousse, oil, grease, or pomade.

#### **After hair loss:**

- **Protect your scalp.** Your scalp may feel tender after hair loss. Cover your head with a hat, turban, or scarf when you are outside. If the scalp is tender from radiation, choose hair coverings that fit loosely. Try not to be in places where the temperature is very cold or very hot. This means staying away from the direct sun, sun lamps, and very cold air.
- **Stay warm.** Your hair helps keep you warm, so you may feel colder once you lose it. You can stay warmer by wearing a hat, turban, scarf, or wig.

**You will lose hair only on the part of your body being treated.**