

Greenwich Hospital

SYMPTOM MANAGEMENT: HAIR LOSS

PATIENT/FAMILY INFORMATION SHEET

What is alopecia?

Alopecia means hair loss. It may include loss of part or all of your hair including head, eyebrows, eyelashes, pubic hair, or general body hair. Some chemotherapy drugs cause thinning or loss of hair. This is temporary; after chemotherapy the hair will grow back. Radiation therapy can also cause hair loss but only to the area being treated. For example, if you are receiving radiation treatment to the hip, there will not be hair loss to the head. Hair loss does not always happen right away. It may begin several weeks after treatment begins. When hair grows back, it may be a different color or texture.

What can be done about hair loss?

- Ask your physician whether to expect some thinning or complete hair loss. Consider cutting hair short to get “used to” the change that will happen.
- Purchase a wig or hairpiece before you lose most of your hair or bring a picture of yourself to match hairstyle and color. Synthetic wigs cost less than wigs made of human hair and are easier to care for. Ask the physician for a prescription that states that the wig is part of your treatment (the physician should write “cranial prosthesis due to treatment”). Send this with the wig receipt to your insurance company. You may be eligible for reimbursement.
- If you don’t want to wear a wig, you can try a partial hairpiece, scarves, hats, caps, or turbans. These options are stylish and also keep your scalp warm.
- If necessary, contact a nurse or social worker at the hospital or physician’s office to obtain information about financial assistance with purchase of the wig or hairpiece.

What personal care is required while losing hair?

- Shampoo your hair or scalp regularly with a gentle shampoo such as baby shampoo.
- Gently comb or brush hair and scalp regularly. Use a soft brush.
- Try a satin pillowcase or a soft nightcap for sleep. Do not sleep with rollers.
- Avoid using perms and/or hair colors.
- Wear a cotton/terry turban to “catch” hair during hair loss.
- If scalp is dry, itchy or tender, message with a moisturizer.
- Protect your scalp from the sun with a hat or a sunscreen.

For more Patient Education Fact Sheets, see the Greenwich Hospital web site at www.greenhosp.org and click on Patients & Visitors, then Patient Education Rev. 9/04