Hair loss (alopecia) is a temporary or permanent loss of hair that occurs as a side effect of chemotherapy or radiation treatments. Currently there are no medicines that can prevent hair loss during cancer treatment.

Ask your doctor or nurse if and when you should expect hair loss. Remember that with chemotherapy you may lose hair from other areas of the body such as the eyebrows, eyelashes, and pubic region. Because hair grows slowly in these areas, you can expect less hair loss than on the scalp.

With Radiation
Hair loss from radiation treatments is usually permanent. The loss of hair occurs only where the radiation was directed, not all over the body.

With Chemotherapy
Chemotherapy may cause a temporary hair loss that varies from thinning to complete baldness. Chemotherapy medications cause damage to hair cells, which makes them weak and brittle. Hair breaks and falls out easily. Ask your doctor if the chemotherapy you are receiving may cause hair loss.

- How long hair loss lasts depends on the type of medicine and the length of time it is given.
- Hair loss is an individual response. One person who receives a chemotherapy medicine may have total hair loss, while another will not.
- Most hair loss occurs 3 to 4 weeks after chemotherapy treatment has begun.
- Hair will grow back once chemotherapy is finished – it may take 3 to 5 months. Your hair may grow back a different color or texture.

Hair Care
Proper care of your hair may decrease loss and thinning. It will also protect new growth, which should appear shortly after your treatments are completed.

Try to
- Keep your scalp clean with a moisturizing shampoo and conditioner.
- Shampoo less often, about every 3 to 5 days.
- Remove excess water from your hair by patting it gently with a towel.
- Allow hair to air dry or use the lowest temperature setting on the hair dryer.
- Use hair products sparingly.
- Use soft brushes and wide tooth combs when styling your hair.

Avoid
- A lot of brushing and combing.
- Electric curlers and curling irons.
- Hair clips, barrettes, and ponytails with elastic bands.
- Coloring your hair, getting a permanent, or using any other chemical treatment such as for straightening.
Caring for Your Scalp

- To prevent dryness and itching, apply lotions or creams to your scalp. Lotions and creams should contain no perfume or dye (Aveeno®, Curel®).
- Use sunscreen (SPF 30 or higher) on your scalp to prevent sun burn.
- Wear a hat, scarf or wig to protect your scalp.

Wigs, Scarves, and Hats

You may want to get a wig before hair loss occurs. Your natural hair color and style can be matched to the wig.

Some insurance companies will cover a portion if not all of the cost of a wig. Be sure to check with your company. You will need to submit a prescription from your medical or radiation oncologist along with the wig receipt. The prescription should say "hair prosthesis for chemotherapy (or radiation therapy) induced alopecia."

Ask your nurse about the Look Good, Feel Better program in your area. Trained cosmetologists will help you with your changing hair needs and offer expert makeup advice. You can take your time and experiment with styles of hats and scarf tying techniques.

You may also want to check this website of "freebies", discounts and resources: www.happychemo.com

Coping

Coping with hair loss can be difficult. It may be the first sign to the outside world that you are having cancer treatment. If you are struggling with hair loss, recognize and grieve about your loss. Don’t feel badly about these feelings. Talk about them with people you are comfortable with and trust.

There are many experienced and caring professionals to help you deal with hair loss. Your nurse can also direct you to an organization that can provide financial assistance or wigs if you have limited resources.