



CANCERcare®

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fact sheet

HELPING YOUR LOVED ONE OR CHILD COPE WITH HAIR LOSS

It is common for someone living with cancer to feel an array of feelings when they begin losing their hair, including anger, sadness, embarrassment and fear. There are many ways caregivers and parents can help their loved ones cope with this treatment side effect.

FOR CAREGIVERS: HELPING YOUR LOVED ONE EXPERIENCING HAIR LOSS

Validate and listen to the way they feel.

Adjusting to the loss of hair is a unique experience and may bring up a range of emotions. Allow your loved one the time and space to process their feelings in a way that feels right for them. Simply listening and being there can be both helpful and comforting.

Help with practical concerns when possible. If your loved one is interested in a wig or a similar alternative, offer to help them find a local wig clinic in your community. You can also talk to your loved one's health care team about local resources or read CancerCare's fact sheet titled, "Hair Loss During Treatment: Finding Resources and Support" for additional information. Hair loss can also leave the scalp vulnerable to sunburn and treatment can cause skin to be more sensitive to the sun. You can help your loved one get the proper sunscreen and skin care.

Find a new comfort zone. It's important for your loved one to maintain contact with friends and family, but physical changes can make your loved one self-conscious. Ask your loved one what kind of social situations they feel most comfortable with. It may be helpful to consider reaching out to close friends and family in a space where they can feel relaxed, especially early on after hair loss occurs, as this is a new adjustment.

Stay active. Encourage your loved one to engage in activities they enjoy like yoga, meditation or music. This can give them a sense of control and confidence, and can give them a healthy outlet for



processing their feelings. You may also want to talk with your loved one's doctor about an exercise routine. Exercise can improve self-esteem and help them feel strong and healthy.

Talk to your loved one about joining a support group to help them cope. Support groups provide a chance to meet and interact with other people who are going through a similar experience. An oncology social worker can help people cope with this "new normal." CancerCare offers free face-to-face, telephone and online support groups led by professional oncology social workers.

Remember to take it day by day. Your loved one's feelings about their hair loss may change over time. Some days they may feel comfortable without any wig or head covering, and other days they may opt for a wig. Both you and your loved one should take the adjustment process one day at a time, and practicing patience and seeking support can help you both to cope with the impact of hair loss.

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TALKING TO CHILDREN ABOUT HAIR LOSS

It may be helpful to keep in the mind the following when talking to a child about a parent or loved one experiencing hair loss:

- Children understand simple and clear explanations best.
- Provide concrete, age-appropriate information when speaking. Explain that there are special medications that the loved one will need to take that will help stop the cancer from growing. These medications may also cause the loved one's hair to fall out.
- Some children will want to hear a more detailed scientific explanation while others will be satisfied with more general information. Answer your children's questions as accurately as possible. Take into account their age and prior experience with serious illness in the family. If you do not know the answer to a question, don't panic. It's okay to say, "I don't know. I will try to find out the answer and let you know."
- Oncology social workers can help you to find the best ways of engaging in these conversations given your child's age and developmental stage.

Keep in the mind the following when helping a child understand their own hair loss as a side effect of treatment:

- Children who are diagnosed with cancer face unique challenges and adjustments. Reassure the child that hair loss is often temporary and explore whether he or she would feel most comfortable wearing a hat, scarf or wig in the meantime.
- It is common for children to feel an array of emotions when they begin losing their hair including anger, sadness, embarrassment and fear. Let children know that it is safe to express those feelings.
- Remind him or her that although it is upsetting to cope with these side effects, it means that the treatment is working hard to stop the cancer and make his or her body healthy again.



CancerCare® Can Help

Founded in 1944, CancerCare is the leading national organization providing free support services and information to help people manage the emotional, practical and financial challenges of cancer. Our comprehensive services include counseling and support groups over the phone, online and in-person, educational workshops, publications and financial and co-payment assistance. All CancerCare services are provided by professional oncology social workers and world-leading cancer experts.

To learn more, visit www.cancercare.org or call **800-813-HOPE (4673)**.

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