

**Hair can be a meaningful part of our identity. When people living with cancer lose their hair, they may feel embarrassment, sadness or many other emotions. This fact sheet covers ways you can help a loved one dealing with hair loss:**

- The emotional effects of hair loss
- Giving practical support
- Talking to children about hair loss



## Helping Your Loved One Emotionally

Our hair can be a meaningful part of our sense of self and identity. Here are ways to help your loved one cope with hair loss:

**Accept/validate their feelings.** Hair loss can mean a great deal to our sense of self. In many cultures, hair can provide an exceptionally powerful sense of personal identity.

**Give your loved one a way to express themselves.** Being present and listening can help people with cancer feel supported. Be sure to give space for your loved one to express their feelings.

**Suggest a support group.** Support groups are a chance to meet others who are experiencing hair loss and other physical changes. CancerCare offers support groups led by oncology social workers.

**Take things day by day.** Feelings about hair loss may change over time. Wearing a wig or head covering may not feel comfortable. Take things one day at a time and try to be patient.



## Give Practical Support

**Help with wigs or alternatives.** If your loved one is interested in a wig or similar head coverings, offer to help them find a local wig clinic. You can also help by contacting their insurance company to check whether a wig is a covered benefit. Hair loss can also make the scalp vulnerable to sunburn. Help with sunscreen, skin care products or hats.

**Make new routines and keep old ones.** Your loved one may be uncertain how to handle social situations. Discuss what feels best for them. Think about meeting with close friends and family in comfortable spaces after the hair loss.

**Stay active.** Encourage your loved one to remain active. If they stick to familiar physical and mental routines, they can feel a sense of control and confidence. However, they should only do as much as they feel is right for them at any time.



## 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 benefit from simple and clear explanations that are easy to understand.
- Say that the medications that their loved one is taking to help against the cancer may cause hair to fall out. Be clear that hair loss is a result of treatment and not cancer.
- Some children will want to hear more detailed scientific explanations, and others will be satisfied with general information. Answer your children's questions as accurately as possible.

Keep in the mind the following when helping a child understand their own hair loss:

- Reassure children that hair loss is often temporary and explore whether they would feel most comfortable wearing a hat, scarf or wig.
- Let children know that it is safe to express their strong feelings and provide space for them to do so through play, art and dialogue.
- Remind children that hair loss shows that the treatment is working hard to stop the cancer and make their bodies 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 resource navigation, 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 master's-prepared oncology social workers and world-leading cancer experts.

To learn more, visit [www.cancercare.org](http://www.cancercare.org) or call **800-813-HOPE (4673)**.

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*This fact sheet is supported by the Anna Fuller Fund, Bristol Myers Squibb and a grant from Genentech.*