

**MACMILLAN**  
CANCER SUPPORT

# COPING WITH HAIR LOSS





If you are struggling with hair loss, it's important to get any emotions out. Whether that's with family, friends or a counsellor, just don't hold back.

Amanda, diagnosed with breast cancer

# About this booklet

**This booklet is about hair loss. It is for anyone coping with changes to their hair during and after cancer treatment.**

This booklet explains:

- how cancer treatment may affect your hair
- how to prepare for and cope with hair loss
- what to expect after treatment finishes.

We hope it helps you deal with some of the questions or feelings you may have. You can also talk to your doctor or nurse about how cancer treatment may affect you.

## How to use this booklet

Hair loss affects people in different ways, so you may find that only some sections of the booklet apply to you. You don't have to read it from start to finish. You can use the contents list on page 3 to help you. It is fine to skip parts of the booklet. You can always come back to them when you feel ready.

On pages 97 to 99, there are some contact details of other useful organisations. If you want to write down notes or questions, there is space on page 100.

## Quotes

Throughout this booklet, we have included quotes from people who have had hair loss. These are from people who have chosen to share their story with us. Some are from Amanda, Doug and Lurline, who are also on the cover of this booklet. To share your experience, visit [macmillan.org.uk/shareyourstory](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/shareyourstory)

## For more information

We have videos on our website about coping with hair loss, which you may find helpful – visit [macmillan.org.uk/hairloss](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/hairloss)

If you have more questions or would like to talk to someone, call the Macmillan Support Line free on **0808 808 00 00**, 7 days a week, 8am to 8pm, or visit [macmillan.org.uk](https://www.macmillan.org.uk)

If you would prefer to speak to us in another language, interpreters are available. Please tell us, in English, the language you want to use. If you are deaf or hard of hearing, call us using NGT (Text Relay) on **18001 0808 808 00 00**, or use the NGT Lite app.

We have some information in different languages and formats, including audio, eBooks, easy read, Braille, large print and translations. To order these, visit [macmillan.org.uk/otherformats](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/otherformats) or call **0808 808 00 00**.

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**'The treatment side effect I was least looking forward to was hair loss. But I thought, "Maybe this is a chance to have a different hair style".'**

**Lurline, diagnosed with breast cancer**

# CANCER TREATMENTS AND HAIR LOSS

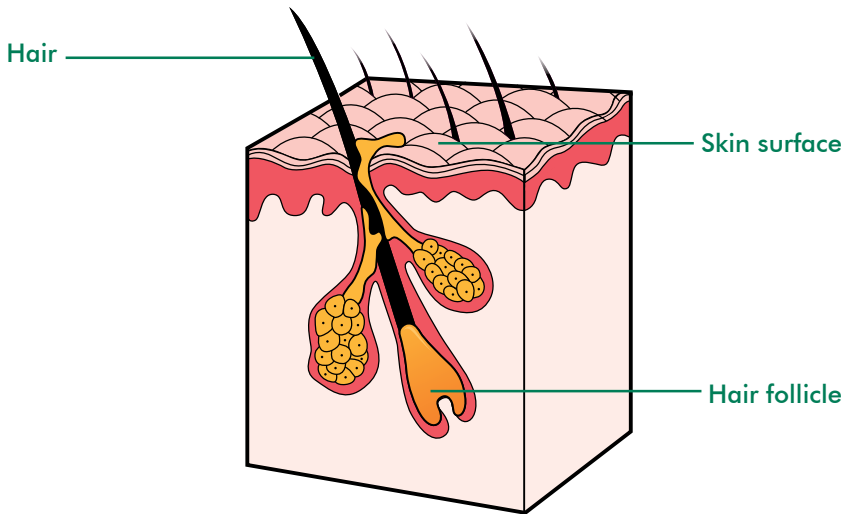
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# Treatments and hair growth

Our hair grows from tiny dents in the skin called **follicles** (see diagram below). Each hair grows, rests and then falls out. When we are healthy, about 90% of our hair is at the growing stage of this cycle.

## The structure of a hair





## How do cancer treatments affect hair growth?

Cancer treatments can affect the normal stages your hair goes through when it grows:

- Some treatments may make your hair fall out completely. This may be from your head and other parts of your body. This is usually temporary.
- Other treatments can cause permanent hair loss in specific areas of your body.
- Sometimes you may not lose all your hair. But your hair can become thinner or more likely to break (brittle).

# Chemotherapy

Chemotherapy uses anti-cancer (cytotoxic) drugs to destroy cancer cells. The drugs work by attacking the cancer cells and disrupting their growth. Chemotherapy can also affect the normal cells in the body, including the cells of the hair follicles.

Cancer cells and hair follicle cells both divide quickly. Chemotherapy treatment affects the normal hair growth cycle and causes hair loss. This is called **chemotherapy-induced alopecia (CIA)**. However, unlike cancer cells, the hair cells quickly recover. This means that if you lose your hair due to chemotherapy, it will almost always grow back when your treatment is over.

Many people assume that they will lose their hair if they have chemotherapy. This is not always true. Many chemotherapy drugs can cause hair loss. But some chemotherapy treatments never cause hair loss. If you don't lose your hair, this does not mean that the chemotherapy is not working.

Hair loss can vary from mild shedding that is hardly noticeable, to complete hair loss. The amount of hair that falls out depends on:

- the drug or combination of drugs used
- the doses given
- the way your body reacts to the drug.

New chemotherapy treatments are being tested all the time. So it is not always possible to tell whether someone will lose their hair.

For some people, a process called scalp cooling can reduce or prevent hair loss (see pages 33 to 38).

Some chemotherapy drugs make other body hair fall out, such as:

- eyebrows and eyelashes
- nose hair
- beards and moustaches
- chest hair
- leg, arm and underarm hair
- pubic hair.

This is almost always temporary. We have some practical tips to help you cope with this hair loss on pages 46 to 49.

Before you start chemotherapy, your doctor or chemotherapy nurse will talk to you about side effects and how likely hair loss is.

## During chemotherapy

If your hair is going to fall out from chemotherapy, it usually starts 2 to 3 weeks after your first session. Sometimes it can start within a few days, but this is rare. The first thing you may notice is hair on your pillow in the morning. You may also see more hair coming out when you brush, comb or wash it. We have some tips on caring for your hair during treatment on pages 42 to 43.

Some people only lose some of their hair. The remaining hair will look thinner. For other people, hair may keep falling out over several weeks, leading to total hair loss. Sometimes the hair comes out very quickly over one or two days, which can be very upsetting. You may find that your scalp feels tender. We have some tips on looking after your skin on page 44.

Your hair loss may continue throughout your treatment and for a few weeks afterwards. Sometimes your hair may start to grow back between treatments and then fall out again.

Some people do not lose their hair, but their hair becomes dry and weak and breaks easily. If this happens to your hair, be careful with your usual hair care routine to help reduce damage.

## Will my hair grow back after chemotherapy?

Hair loss from chemotherapy is almost always temporary, so your hair should start to grow back. However, very rarely hair loss can be permanent. When your hair grows back, the new hair can be different to what it was like before treatment. It may:

- be curlier, straighter, finer, fluffier or a different colour
- grow back unevenly at different speeds.

Facial hair, such as beards and moustaches, may also grow back patchy or a different colour. It may take a while for facial hair to return to what it was like before treatment.

You will probably have a full head of hair 3 to 6 months after treatment ends. After around 12 months, you should have a good idea of how thick your hair will be.

Very rarely, after high doses of chemotherapy, not all hair grows back. Very occasionally, some follicles (see page 6) will not make a new replacement hair. This can make your hair permanently thinner.

If you are concerned about your hair growth after treatment, speak to your doctor or nurse.

Our booklet **Understanding chemotherapy** discusses the treatment and its side effects in more detail. See page 92 for ways to order this. We also have information about individual chemotherapy drugs and their side effects on our website – visit [macmillan.org.uk/chemotherapy](http://macmillan.org.uk/chemotherapy)

# Radiotherapy

Radiotherapy treats cancer by using high-energy rays that destroy the cancer cells, while doing as little harm as possible to normal cells. There are different types of radiotherapy. External beam radiotherapy is given from outside the body. Internal radiotherapy is given using a radioactive material that is placed inside the body.

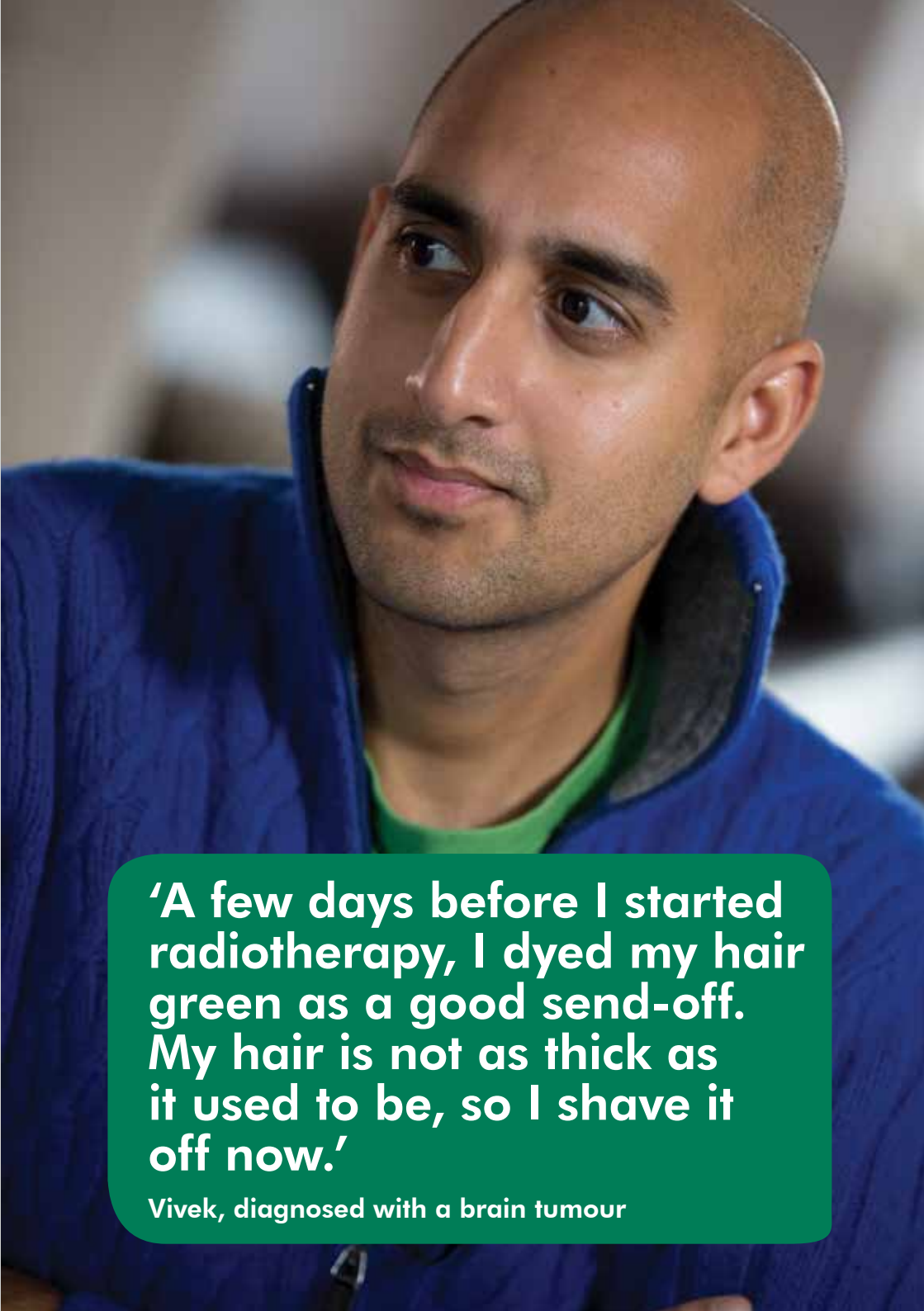
Radiotherapy will only cause hair loss in the part of the body that is being treated. Hair loss can happen where the radiation beam leaves the body (for example, on the back of the neck), as well as where it enters the body:

- If you have external radiotherapy to your head, you will probably lose some hair from your scalp. This will be in the areas where the radiotherapy beam goes into and out of your scalp.
- If you are having treatment for breast cancer, and the radiotherapy includes your armpit, the hair under your arm is likely to fall out.
- If you have a beard and have radiotherapy to your head or neck, you may lose your beard.

Ask your cancer specialist or radiographer to show you exactly where your hair may fall out.

The hair loss will also depend on the strength of the dose and the number of treatments you have.

Hair usually begins to fall out after 2 to 3 weeks. It takes about a week for the hair in the treatment area to fall out completely.



**'A few days before I started radiotherapy, I dyed my hair green as a good send-off. My hair is not as thick as it used to be, so I shave it off now.'**

**Vivek, diagnosed with a brain tumour**

## Will my hair grow back after radiotherapy?

Hair re-growth after radiotherapy will depend on lots of things, including the:

- type and dose of treatment
- number of treatments given
- area of your body affected.

Your radiographer can usually tell you before the treatment if your hair is likely to grow back.

If you have been told your hair will grow back, this can start once your skin has healed after treatment. Usually, your hair will start to grow back 3 to 6 months after finishing your treatment. But it may take longer if the treatment dose has been high. The hair that grows back may be thinner, patchy or a different colour.

Sometimes the hair loss is permanent. This can be especially upsetting if it affects the hair on your head. Remember, you can talk things over with one of our cancer support specialists on **0808 808 00 00**.

If you have hair loss on your head, you may want to wear a hairpiece, wig or some other type of headwear (see pages 54 to 63). It may also be possible to have a hair transplant. However, hair transplants are specialised treatments that are not available on the NHS. If you are considering a hair transplant, contact the Institute of Trichologists for a list of qualified surgeons on **0845 604 4657**. This option is not suitable for everyone.

Our booklet **Understanding radiotherapy** discusses the treatment and its side effects in more detail. See page 92 for information on how to order this.



# Other treatments

## Surgery

If you are having surgery in an area of the body that has hair, such as an operation for a brain tumour, an area of the head will be shaved. This is usually a small area of hair and it will grow back after the operation.

## Hormonal and targeted (biological) therapies

Some people notice that their hair becomes thinner while taking a hormonal therapy or targeted (biological) therapy. This is usually mild and the hair grows back at the end of treatment. If you have a beard, you may notice that you have less beard growth.

You may also notice that the hair on your head and body is finer, curlier or more brittle. Each therapy has different possible side effects. Ask your doctor if your hair is likely to change.

Any hair loss from hormonal or targeted therapies nearly always grows back once you have finished treatment. Your doctor can advise you about the type of drug you are taking.

We have more information about other cancer treatments and possible side effects. Call us on **0808 808 00 00** to order the information you need.

# Questions to ask your healthcare team

Not all cancer treatments affect hair in the same way. It can help to know what changes to expect and how to prepare yourself. Here are some questions you may like to ask your doctor or nurse.

## For all types of cancer treatment

- Does the treatment that I'm having usually cause hair loss?
- Will I have complete hair loss, patchy hair loss or thinning?
- How long after starting my treatment is hair loss likely to happen? How quickly will my hair fall out?
- Will I lose hair from other parts of my body? For example, my eyelashes, eyebrows, facial hair or pubic hair?
- Is there anything I can do to prevent hair loss?
- Will my hair grow back after the treatment has finished?
- How long after treatment can I expect my hair to grow back?
- Can I get financial help to buy a wig or hairpiece (see pages 76 to 79)?
- Can you recommend any local headwear suppliers or support groups?

## If you are having chemotherapy

- Is scalp cooling an option for me to help prevent hair loss (see pages 33 to 38)?
- How likely is it that scalp cooling will work?

## If you are having radiotherapy

- Can you tell me the size and location of the treatment area?
- Can you tell me how much hair I will lose in this area?

You can also ask your doctor for a diagram of the body, so they can show you where your hair may fall out.

**'I still have down days when I don't like the way it looks. But I am not ashamed of how I look. That's who I am.'**

**Sara, diagnosed with breast cancer**



# YOUR FEELINGS ABOUT HAIR LOSS

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# Emotional support

People's first question when they are told they have cancer is often, 'Will I lose my hair?'.

Our hair can be an important part of our appearance and identity. It may be a way we express our personality. Often, when our hair looks good, we feel good.

Many people find losing their hair upsetting. You may feel uncomfortable about socialising with your different appearance. If your hair is important to you for religious or cultural reasons, it can be even more difficult to adjust to losing it. You might also worry about how it will affect relationships with your family and friends.

'Nothing prepared me for the loss of my hair. Because it happened so quickly, it took me by surprise. But I got support and eventually got through it.'

**Lurline**

# Your feelings

People have different feelings about losing their hair. For some, losing their hair is one of the hardest parts of having treatment. For others, it is not as bad as they expected.

You may feel low in confidence, anxious or depressed. You may feel angry that the hair loss is a visible reminder of the cancer – for you and for others. It may feel like you have to tell people about your cancer diagnosis when you don't want to.

Losing your hair may make you feel vulnerable and exposed. You may feel this even more if your eyebrows, eyelashes or pubic hair fall out.

If you have a beard or moustache, losing this can be difficult, especially if you have had facial hair for a long time. You may think of your beard or moustache as part of your usual appearance and not feel right without it for a while.

All these different feelings are completely normal. Our booklet **How are you feeling? The emotional effects of cancer** suggests different ways to manage difficult feelings. See page 92 for information on how to order this.

## Other people's reactions

Today, cancer is much more talked about than it was in the past. People are more aware of the effects of cancer treatment on hair. It is more openly discussed and accepted. But sometimes family and friends may be upset by your hair loss and find it hard not to show it. This can be difficult for you to deal with. Try to remember it is usually because they are concerned for you and may not know how to react.

Only you can decide whether to tell people you have cancer. You should not feel under pressure to tell people if you do not want to.

'When some people first saw me with no hair, they were a bit shocked. But then you start talking and they realise you are still the same person.'

**Julie**





## Talking about it

Most people find that their family and friends are very supportive, and that it can help to talk through their feelings about losing their hair. But it may take some time for you to come to terms with your hair loss. It may also take you time to talk with other people about your hair loss and deal with their reactions.

At the hospital, you will probably meet other people who have lost their hair. They may be able to give you advice and tips on how they have coped.

You can also meet people at cancer support groups. We can give you details of support groups in your area (see page 95).

Some people find it easier to talk to someone they do not know. You can call our cancer support specialists on **0808 808 00 00** if you are finding it hard to cope with hair loss, cancer or your treatment. They can also give you information about counselling and how to contact a counsellor in your area.

Our Online Community is a social networking site where you can chat with other people, make friends and join support groups. You can also read posts or blogs other people have written about hair loss, or you can write about your experiences. See page 95 for more information about our Online Community.

Our booklet **Talking about cancer** has practical advice on how to talk to people close to you. See page 92 for ways to order this.

# Facing your fears

When you have hair loss, it is common to avoid situations that make you feel anxious.

Here is an example of how facing your fears can sometimes reduce anxiety and help you feel more confident.

Anita's hair was growing back after treatment. She planned to meet a friend for lunch, but she was anxious about going out for the first time without her wig. She chose a quiet hotel and agreed to meet her friend in the reception area.

Anita did not know that there was a big event at the hotel that day, and that people she knew would be there. When she realised, her first reaction was to leave straight away. But she did not want to let her friend down, so she stayed and waited anxiously.

Her anxiety quickly passed as people she knew came up to her and were clearly happy to see her. They did not seem to notice her hair, and people she did not know just carried on as usual.

We have a video on our website of Amanda, Doug and Lurline talking about how hair loss affected them and how they coped – visit [macmillan.org.uk/hairloss](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/hairloss)



**'I would get up in the morning and find my hair on my pillow. Eventually, I cut it all off. It was my way of taking charge.'**

**Matt, diagnosed with leukaemia**

# PREPARING FOR HAIR LOSS

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How to prepare for hair loss

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# How to prepare for hair loss

There are some things that you can do to help you feel more in control when your hair starts to fall out.

## Talk to family and friends

Other people's reactions to your hair loss can sometimes be difficult to cope with. They may feel uncomfortable and not know what to say. It can help if you talk about it first. Once they hear you talking about your hair loss, they may be able to offer you more help and support. For example, they may be able to help you choose a wig or hairpiece that suits you.

If you have children, you may worry that they will be scared if they see you without hair. But children usually cope well when they are told about any changes to your appearance in advance.

We have more information about talking about cancer and talking to children and teenagers that we can send you. Call us on **0808 808 00 00** to order the information you need.

'I decided early on that I would shave my head before the hair loss struck, but I asked my children their opinion. They agreed, so I let them loose with the clippers!'

**Anna**

## Find a hair loss support group

You may find it helpful to talk to other people with hair loss. You can talk to people who are going through the same thing and exchange tips on how to cope. Ask your doctor or nurse about support groups in your local area.

Support is also available on our Online Community (see page 95).

## Get a wig before treatment starts

You may feel that everyone will notice if you are wearing a wig. But it is very common for people to change their hair colour and style. Often, people may not realise you are wearing a wig.

If you decide you would like to wear a wig, it is a good idea to get one before you start treatment. It will be easier to match the wig to your own hair colour and style. You can get used to wearing the wig before your hair starts to fall out. It will also be ready in case your hair loss happens earlier or quicker than you expect.

In England, some people can get wigs for free on the NHS. In Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, some wigs are free on prescription. Your nurse can tell you where to go to look at wigs.

If you want a wig that is not covered by the prescription, you can pay extra for it. Some people decide to buy their own wig. It is a good idea to take a family member or friend with you when you are picking your wig.

We have more information about wigs on pages 67 to 83.

## Buy a hat or other headwear

You may need something to keep your head warm or protected when you are not wearing a wig. Your scalp will be more sensitive to cold, windy or sunny weather. Even at home your head may feel very cold if you have been used to having a full head of hair. Some people find they prefer to wear a hat or other headwear instead of a wig.

## Consider cutting your hair short

Many people prepare themselves for losing their hair by cutting it short. Losing smaller clumps of hair can be less emotional than losing longer clumps. Hair often comes out in uneven patches. This is usually less noticeable on shorter hair. It can also give your family and friends the chance to get used to seeing you with shorter hair.

Some people prefer to shave their heads completely before they start losing their hair. This can give a sense of control over what is going to happen. You may prefer to do this rather than wait for your hair to fall out. If you want to remove all your hair, use clippers. Shaving with a blade or razor can lead to cuts and infections.

If you do not want to cut your hair for cultural or religious reasons, you may find other headwear helpful, such as hats, scarves or bandanas. We have more information about hats and other headwear on pages 54 to 60.



## Tips for cutting your hair short

- Cut your hair in stages to give you time to get used to a new length.
- If you decide to crop your hair short yourself, remove the length of your hair with scissors first. Then use a set of clippers with a cutting guard or attachment on them. If possible, try to get someone to help you with this.
- Leave a very short layer of hair. Don't shave your head with a blade, as this can lead to cuts and infection.
- It is easier to use clippers on clean, dry hair with no products in it.
- If you want a hairdresser to cut your hair, there are salons that specialise in styling hair for people affected by cancer. You can find some salons through the charity [mynewhair.org](https://www.mynewhair.org) which trains salons to provide support for medical hair loss.

## Think about your eyebrows and eyelashes

You might be worried about losing your eyebrows and eyelashes. It may be a good plan to buy products you think you will need and learn how to use them.

You could check whether a Boots Macmillan Beauty Advisor is available at your local Boots store. Boots Macmillan Beauty Advisors have been trained to support people living with cancer. They offer free, face-to-face advice about caring for your skin, hair and nails. Visit [boots.com/macmillan](https://www.boots.com/macmillan) to find out more.

We have more information about eyebrows and eyelashes on pages 46 to 48.



**'Some people find scalp cooling uncomfortable, but it was an easy process for me. The cold cap looks a bit like a space helmet – it's also really cold!'**

**Amanda**

# SCALP COOLING

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# Scalp cooling during chemotherapy

Cooling your head in certain ways during chemotherapy may reduce or prevent hair loss. Scalp cooling can reduce the blood flow to your scalp. This can stop the chemotherapy drug from affecting your hair.

## Types of scalp cooling

There are two types of scalp cooling: the cold gel cap and the refrigerated cooling system.

### Cold gel cap

This method uses a special cap that is filled with cold gel. It can be fitted easily and kept in place with Velcro®. Some people find the cold cap uncomfortable or heavy to wear. It can also give some people a headache. The cap needs to be changed every 20 to 40 minutes to keep your scalp cool.

### Refrigerated cooling system

The other type of scalp cooling uses a refrigerated cooling system. It pumps liquid coolant through a cap. This cap generally feels lighter than a gel-filled cap. You need to sit next to the machine while the cap is in place. This means that, unlike with a cold gel cap, you cannot walk about freely.

Someone having the cold gel cap treatment



## Things to consider

Both types of scalp cooling cap need to be worn for up to 30 to 40 minutes before your chemotherapy drugs are given, and for some time afterwards. You may have the cap on for a few hours in total. The chemotherapy staff can help you feel as comfortable as possible.

Scalp cooling is only effective when used with certain chemotherapy drugs. It is not always possible to know how well it will work until you try it. Scalp cooling is not suitable during treatment for some types of cancer. Some hospitals do not have facilities for scalp cooling. Your doctor or chemotherapy nurse can tell you if it is available and suitable for you.



Someone having the refrigerated cooling system treatment

# Who can have scalp cooling?

Scalp cooling is not suitable if:

- You have a blood (haematological) cancer, such as myeloma, leukaemia or lymphoma. This is because there is a risk of cancer cells surviving in the blood vessels of the scalp. This means that the cancer may come back.
- You have already had your first course of chemotherapy without scalp cooling.
- You need very high doses of chemotherapy. Scalp cooling is less likely to work with high-dose chemotherapy.
- You are having continuous chemotherapy through a pump for several days.
- Your liver is not working as well as it should be. The chemotherapy drugs may stay in the body for longer than usual. It may not be possible to keep the scalp cold for long enough.
- You have severe migraines.

# How effective is scalp cooling?

Scalp cooling can be effective in preventing or reducing hair loss. But you will not know how well it will work for you until you try it.

Even if you have scalp cooling, you may find that your hair still gets thinner. Unfortunately, some people who have scalp cooling still lose their hair. If you lose your hair, your nurse will usually talk to you about stopping the scalp cooling. This is to protect your scalp from the effects of the cold temperatures.

Some people find that gradually losing their hair while using scalp cooling is harder to cope with than a quicker hair loss without scalp cooling.

Scalp cooling only protects the hair on your scalp. Body hair may still fall out, including eyelashes, eyebrows, beards and moustaches, chest hair and pubic hair.

If you are interested in scalp cooling, talk to your doctor or nurse. They can tell you if it is available and suitable for you.

'I tried the cold cap twice. It was very cold, but I wanted to try anything to keep my hair. Unfortunately, it didn't work for me.'

**Lurline**







**'I went to an event that gave me lots of make-up tips, which meant I could draw on features. I actually felt a bit more normal.'**

**Penny, diagnosed with breast cancer**

# PRACTICAL TIPS FOR COPING WITH HAIR LOSS

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# Caring for your hair

The tips in this section are suitable for all hair types. If your hair is dry or brittle during or after your cancer treatment, the following information could help. The tips are especially helpful for curly or Afro-Caribbean hair, which naturally gets damaged more easily.

## Tips for washing your hair

- Wash your hair at least once every two days. Leaving a longer time between washes will not prevent hair loss. Not washing your hair may cause problems as any hair you lose can build up on your head and tangle.
- Only use gentle hair products and non-medicated shampoo. Special products are available for Afro-Caribbean hair and other hair types.
- If you are having radiotherapy to your head, check with the radiotherapy staff if you can use shampoo and ask which type is best.
- When washing your hair, only put conditioner on the middle lengths and ends of the hair in small sections.

## Drying and styling your hair

- When drying your hair with a towel, don't rub hard.
- Use a brush with wide-spaced prongs or a wide-toothed comb. Full-bristle brushes will pull your hair. Use a wide-toothed comb when your hair is wet, as combs cause less damage than brushes. Start combing from the ends to reduce tangles.
- Avoid too much heat from hairdryers or heated rollers. These can dry the hair and make it break. Put hairdryers on a low heat and hold at least 15cm (6in) away from the hair. Try to leave your hair damp, as moisture is important for your hair's health.
- Avoid using hair straighteners during treatment, as these may damage fragile hair.
- Avoid wearing your hair in a tight band, as this can damage and break it. If you plait your hair, plait it gently.
- Avoid perming, colouring or chemically relaxing your hair, as this can make it even more dry and brittle. We have more tips on colouring, perming or relaxing your hair after treatment has finished on pages 87 to 88.
- At night, wear a hair net, soft cap or turban to stop your hair becoming tangled and to collect any loose hair.

# Caring for your skin

If your hair falls out, it is important to take care of the skin on your head and other places where you had hair. It may be more sensitive or tender than skin on other parts of your body.

- If you are having radiotherapy, talk to the radiographers about which deodorants, soaps, perfumes and lotions you can use. If you develop a skin reaction, such as soreness or a change in skin colour, let the radiotherapy staff know as soon as possible. They will advise you on the best way to manage it.
- Shampoo your scalp every day, even if you have lost all your hair. Scalp tissue still contains oil and sweat glands. Shampooing every day is especially important if you are wearing a wig. Use a perfume-free product.
- Use a gentle, unperfumed moisturiser on your scalp if it gets dry, flaky or itchy.
- Use pillowcases made of natural fibres, such as cotton or linen. Man-made (synthetic) fibres, like nylon and polyester, can irritate the scalp.
- Cover your head with a hat to make sure your skin does not burn on sunny days. If you do not want to cover your head, use a suncream with a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 30 on your scalp whenever you go out.
- Cover your head when it is cold to protect your scalp and to prevent heat loss.
- If you wear a wig, leave it off whenever possible to let your scalp have some air.



# Eyebrows, eyelashes and other body hair

Losing your eyebrows, eyelashes and other body hair can be upsetting. But there are practical ways to cope with these changes, which we have listed over the next few pages.

Our leaflet **Feel more like you**, written in partnership with Boots, has more information about coping with the visible side effects of cancer treatment. See page 92 for ways to order this.

In some Boots stores, you can have appointments with Boots Macmillan Beauty Advisors. The Beauty Advisors have been trained to support people living with cancer. They offer free, face-to-face advice about caring for your skin, hair and nails. Visit [boots.com/macmillan](https://www.boots.com/macmillan) to find out more.

## Eyebrows

If you lose your eyebrows or find that they are thinner, you can redraw them with an eyebrow pencil that matches your normal hair colour. Eyebrow pencils are available from any chemist or beauty shop. Beauty counters in department stores can show you how to redraw your eyebrows.

To make your eyebrows as realistic and natural-looking as possible, follow the natural eyebrow arch and draw in short, feathery strokes that look like the normal eyebrow hair. Make the brow thicker on the inner end of the eyebrow (nearest to the nose) and thinner at the outer edge.



Another natural-looking way to redraw the eyebrows is by using an eye shadow powder and applying it with a make-up brush. You can also use false eyebrows. They need to be stuck on with special glue, which is available from false eyebrow suppliers.

Some people may find that drawing eyebrows with an eyebrow pencil is not suitable for them. Wearing a pair of thick-rimmed glasses can also help to hide your missing eyebrows.

Some people choose to have permanent tattooing to create new eyebrows. This can be done by some cosmetic salons, medical tattoo specialists and tattooing shops. It should only be carried out by registered tattooists with an up-to-date health and safety certificate. Talk to your cancer doctor or nurse before getting a tattoo.

We have a video on our website that shows you how to redraw your eyebrows when you have hair loss – visit [macmillan.org.uk/hairloss](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/hairloss)

'One thing I didn't like was getting up in the middle of the night and catching a sight of myself in the mirror. In the morning, I would always apply some eyebrows straight away.'

**Adele**

## Eyelashes

False eyelashes can be used to give a natural appearance. These are available from many beauty departments. Many department stores have private rooms where staff can show you how to apply the eyelashes. Wearing glasses can be another good option.

We have a video on our website that shows you different make-up tips you can try to help disguise thin eyelashes or if your eyelashes fall out completely – visit [macmillan.org.uk/hairloss](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/hairloss)

## Moustaches and beards

Facial hair can be an important part of your identity. Or it may be important for cultural or religious reasons. Losing a moustache or a beard can be very difficult to deal with.

Some online companies, make-up shops or theatrical shops sell moustaches or beards. Some of these can be tailored specially, but this can be very expensive.

## Pubic hair

Some people temporarily lose their pubic hair. This can be upsetting and you may worry about how you look. If you have a partner, you may also be concerned about what they think and worry that it could affect your sex life. Try to be open with your partner and talk about how you feel. Often by talking, you will find that it is not such a problem after all.

Our leaflet **Cancer, you and your partner** has more information on how cancer can affect your relationship with your partner. See page 92 for ways to order this.

## Nasal hair

If you lose the hair from inside your nose, you may be more likely to have a runny nose. Although this can be irritating, it is only temporary and will stop when the hairs grow back. Try to take plenty of tissues with you when you go out.



**'I wore a bandana when I lost my hair. Some people, who I have known for years, didn't even recognise me!'**

**Doug, diagnosed with breast cancer**

# OPTIONS IF YOU HAVE HAIR LOSS

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# Options for people with hair loss

There are many practical ways to cope with hair loss. They do not make the problem disappear, but they can make life a bit easier for you during this difficult time.

Some hospitals have staff who can show you how to wear different types of headwear. They can also give you ideas and tips on how to cope with hair loss. You can ask your nurse whether there is anyone who can help you. You could also ask a professional hairdresser for advice.

Some hospitals run hair and beauty programmes for people affected by cancer. Your nurses should be able to tell you if your hospital has these programmes, or if there are any nearby. Most of these programmes are for women, but the Look Good Feel Better For Men website has information for men affected by cancer. It includes practical tips on coping with hair loss. Visit [lookgoodfeelbetterformen.org](http://lookgoodfeelbetterformen.org)

We have videos on our website of the different wigs and headwear available. These videos show you how to choose a wig and style it, how to tie a scarf, and hat and turban options. To watch these videos, visit [macmillan.org.uk/hairloss](http://macmillan.org.uk/hairloss)



## Wigs

Many people choose to wear a wig, as they want to look the way they usually do. You may not want people other than close family and friends to know you have cancer. You might choose a wig in a similar style to your usual hairstyle. Or you might take the chance to try out different styles. If you have only lost some of your hair, there are also half wigs and three-quarter wigs that may be suitable for you.

See pages 67 to 83 for information on how to choose and wear a wig.

## Hats

Hats are also a popular option. They come in many different shapes, styles and colours. They are common fashion accessories, and they can be very practical because they keep your head warm. Wearing a wide-brimmed hat outside is also a great way of protecting your head and scalp from the sun.

Department stores usually have a good selection, and there are also specialist hat shops. Try on a range of different styles to find one that suits you and feels comfortable.

'After my third chemotherapy, I went back to work and was in a meeting. I felt uneasy going to a meeting with no hair, so I wore a baseball cap – I couldn't find anything else!'

**Deb**



## Scarves and bandanas

Scarves are another option. They are available in different colours and materials, and are light and easy to wear. The best fabrics to use are cotton, light-weight wool, or blends. Satin-type materials tend to slide off the head too easily.

Scarves may have instructions and suggestions on how to tie them. You may like to try the styles we describe over the next few pages.

'Headscarves allowed me to be creative and play with different looks. I had fun doing this. They also helped me to cope, especially because I got compliments.'

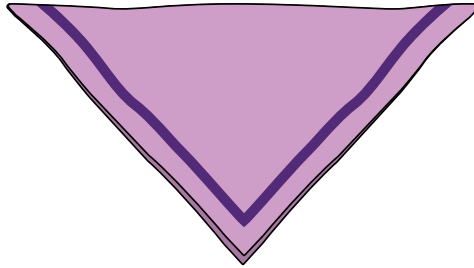
**Lurline**

## How to tie a headwrap

For a basic headwrap, you will need a scarf at least 75 x 75cm (29.5 x 29.5in) in size. For more elaborate styles, it needs to be 100 x 100cm (39 x 39in).

Follow these steps on how to tie a basic headwrap:

- 1** Lay a square scarf flat, with the wrong side facing upwards. Fold the scarf diagonally into a triangle.



- 2** Put the scarf on your head with the folded edge about 2.5cm (1in) below your natural hairline, with the triangle point at the back.



3

Tie the ends into a double knot behind your head and over the triangle point. The flap should be underneath the knot. If you are doing more than the basic headwrap, you may only need a single knot.



4

Gently pull the triangle point downwards, so the scarf fits closely to your head.



For different styles and looks, you can try the following:

- Leave the ends of the scarf hanging loose, particularly if it is sunny or you are going to wear a hat on top.
- Tie the ends of the scarf in a bow instead of a knot. Or pull all three ends into an elasticated ponytail band to help make loops and tails to make a bow. This can also look nice under a hat.
- Twist the three ends together to look like a twisted rope and wrap them tightly around the knot like a bun. Secure the loose ends by tucking them through the centre of the bun.
- For a different twist, pull all three ends together and tuck them securely over and under the knot.
- Twist the long ends separately. Bring them forward and tie them at the front of your head. Continue twisting and tucking the ends in around your head. At the back, twist the triangle end and tuck it in. You can vary this by twisting in coloured cord, beads or a contrasting scarf to match what you are wearing. You may find it helps to twist one end at a time. Secure the end with a hair grip, paperclip or elastic band while you twist the other one.

We have a video on our website that shows you the different ways to tie a scarf – visit [macmillan.org.uk/hairloss](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/hairloss)

## How to tie a bandana

For a simple bandana fold, you will need a bandana at least 56 x 56cm (22 x 22in) in size. Some people prefer a larger size.

Follow the steps below on how to tie a bandana.

- 1** Lay your bandana flat, with the wrong side facing upwards. Fold the scarf diagonally into a triangle.
- 2** Put the bandana on your head with the folded edge about 2.5cm (1in) above your normal brow line and the sides of the bandana above your ears. The triangle point will be at the back.
- 3** Tie the two ends of the bandana behind your head twice so it does not come undone.
- 4** Tuck the triangle point under the knot so it does not stick out.



## Turbans

Turbans are available in different materials, such as velvet, silk, cotton and towelling. They are popular and comfortable to wear, especially in hot weather. They are available from some chemists, department stores or specialist wig shops, and from some specialist suppliers.

## Hair accessories and replacements

If you normally have a fringe, you can get one on a Velcro® band from some wig suppliers. Some suppliers also make turbans and scarves with optional fringes or headbands with hair attached. You can also order hats, headbands or bandanas with attached hair from specialist suppliers.

Hairpieces and clip-in hair can be used to thicken thin hair or to cover up small areas of hair loss, for example from radiotherapy. They are only suitable for you if you have some hair. You can attach them using glues, clips or double-sided tape.

Avoid extensions, weaves and any plaiting or bonding systems, as this will put extra tension on the remaining hair. This can affect hair growth and could cause more hair loss. Remove any hairpieces and clips before sleeping to avoid damage to your natural hair.

## Change in hair style

If you have not lost all your hair, you may find that a change in hairstyle helps cover up the hair loss. There are specialist hairdressers who can advise you on a change of style that is most suitable for your situation. Visit [mynewhair.org](http://mynewhair.org) to find details of trained hairdressers.

## Hair transplants

Surgery to replace hair is only suitable if you have permanent hair loss, for example after radiotherapy. A hair transplant surgeon will take hair from a part of your head to cover the area of hair loss. The surgeon will test a small area first, to see if the hair transplants well.

Techniques have greatly improved in recent years and the result can be very natural-looking hair. But this procedure is not suitable for everyone. It is important to talk to a specialist surgeon if you are thinking about this. Contact the Institute of Trichologists for a list of qualified cosmetic surgeons on **0845 604 4657**.

## Proud to be bald

Although we have talked about various types of headwear, you may prefer not to wear anything on your head. Or some people like to show their individual style by using accessories. It is important to do what feels right for you.





# Children and teenagers

Many children are not worried about their hair loss. But if they do want to cover up, there are wigs available for children. There are also hats, caps, scarves and bandanas that they can wear. If a child needs treatment from time to time over a few years, they will probably need a new wig each time while their head is still growing.

If you are a teenager, changes in how you look can be very upsetting. There are lots of natural-looking wigs and other ways to cover hair loss.

If you would like to speak to other teenagers, you can contact Teenage Cancer Trust (see page 97 for contact details). It also has a project called Hair 4 U. This offers young people with cancer the opportunity to choose a free, human-hair wig and have it styled at a salon. There are also websites for teenagers with cancer. Some of these have chat rooms where you can talk about your feelings with other teenagers.

We have more information for children and young people who are living with cancer that we can send you. Call us on **0808 808 00 00** to order the information you need.

# Tips to draw attention away from your hair loss

To start with, you may feel like your wig or other headwear is the first thing people look at. But there are things you can do that take people's attention away from your hair loss:

- Wear brightly coloured shirts, sweaters, tops, ties or neck scarves.
- Try wearing make-up around your eyes, cheekbones or lips to direct attention to your face.
- Wear glasses. This can be very helpful if you have lost your eyebrows or eyelashes.
- Wear jewellery. Other people may notice or comment on your jewellery. Earrings can look good with hats and scarves.

Some hospitals and support groups run programmes, such as Look Good Feel Better (see page 97), that give expert advice on make-up and skincare. Your nurses can tell you if there is a programme like this in your hospital or at a nearby support group.

At first, you may not feel confident going out and carrying on with your social life. But hopefully, as you spend more time with other people, your confidence will grow.

Our booklet **Body image and cancer** has more information about improving your confidence. See page 92 for ways to order this.





**'A relative of mine bought some wigs for me and they were fantastic. People could hardly tell it was a wig and thought it could be a weave.'**

**Diane, diagnosed with ovarian cancer**

# WIGS

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# Wigs for people with hair loss

One practical way of coping with hair loss is to wear a wig or hairpiece. There are many different styles and colours to choose from. They can be natural-looking and comfortable to wear.

Choosing a wig before your hair falls out means you can match the style and colour to your own hair and get used to wearing it. This means you will also have a wig ready, in case your hair falls out sooner than you expected.

There is less choice for men as it is difficult to make a men's short-hair wig look natural around the hairline. Slightly longer hair styles can work better.

## Benefits of wearing a wig

- You look and feel more like yourself, which can make you feel more confident.
- You are more in control of how you look and only need to tell people if you want to.
- You can experiment with different colours and styles.
- Some wigs need very little styling.



## Types of wig

Wigs can be synthetic or made of human hair.

### Synthetic wigs

Wigs can be man-made (synthetic). The way these wigs are made has improved over the last few years.

- These wigs are cheaper than real-hair wigs, and are light and easier to look after. They can cost anything from 50 to several hundred pounds. But they may be free on prescription. See pages 76 to 79 for information about paying for a wig.
- The style is heat-sealed into the hair, so that they can be hand-washed with shampoo, left to dry overnight and are then ready to wear the next day. They can be combed or brushed through gently.
- They usually last for around 4 to 8 months.
- All wigs come with instructions on how to look after them and you should follow these carefully.

**'I've got a collection of wigs: short, mid and longer length, and I really enjoy wearing them. I view them as an advantage, as I can change my appearance when I like.'**

**Gina**



## Human-hair wigs

These wigs may be made from different hair types, which are often bleached and then dyed.

- Human-hair wigs can cost from a few hundred to a few thousand pounds. They are not usually available on the NHS.
- They may need regular cleaning and styling by a professional, which can be expensive.
- Some human-hair wigs can be shampooed and styled at home on a specially-designed wig block. Your wig maker can advise you about this.
- It can help to have two wigs so that you can wear one while the other is being cleaned.

Due to the high demand for real hair, human hair can be mixed with synthetic hair. The synthetic hairs will stretch and frizz when a hairdryer or hair straighteners are used. Ask your hair supplier for more information about this.

## Using your own hair

Many people wonder whether they can have their own hair cut off and made into a wig. This may only be possible if your natural hair is long and in good condition. Even if it is, you may not have enough hair to make a full wig. This is a specialised technique, so it will be expensive (around £2,500 or more) and will usually take at least 10 weeks to make.

# Choosing a wig

Staff at the hospital will advise you on where to go to choose a wig or suggest organisations for you to use. It is a good idea to take a family member or friend with you to help you choose.

Some people like to choose their wig before their hair falls out, so they can match the style and colour to their own hair. The advantage of this is that if you lose your hair sooner than expected, you will be prepared. It also gives you a chance to get used to the wig before you really need it.

If your hair has not fallen out yet, the wig may feel quite tight. Some wigs can adjust to any head size.

There is no pressure on you to choose a wig straight away. You can wait until you feel ready. If you have a hairdresser you trust, you may find it useful to speak to them first.

## Wigs if you are black or from an ethnic minority group

You may need to contact a specialist wig supplier to find a suitable wig. There are companies that work with the NHS to do this. Speak to your cancer nurse or doctor for more information. You can also contact Cancer Black Care for support and advice on **020 8961 4151**.



**'I got a prescription for an NHS wig. However, there are not many suppliers for black and Asian patients. But the supplier I went to customised my wig and had a lot of choice.'**

**Lurline**

## Tips for choosing a wig to match your current style

- Choose the same volume of hair as you had before. Too much hair can make it look obvious that you are wearing a wig. If in doubt, choose a wig with slightly less hair than you had before. Remember that the wig can be cut and styled by a hairdresser or the wig consultant.
- Choose your own colour or one shade lighter. If the hair is darker than your natural colour, it can look strange to your family and friends. Changing to a lighter colour is usually less noticeable.
- Try to get a wig that adjusts to any head size. As your hair falls out, you will need a smaller size.
- If you have a good hairdresser, they could help you choose your wig or hairpiece. They can also cut and style it for you. Wig specialists may also be able to cut and style a wig when you have it fitted. It is best to choose a hairdresser who is specially trained to cut wigs.
- Take someone with you who will give you an honest opinion on the wig.
- If you have any questions about your wig or how to look after it, check with the wig fitter, manufacturer or your hairdresser.

Some people choose to try different looks. Wigs are available in various colours and styles, so you may want to experiment with a different look.

## Fitting your wig

This can be an emotional time, as it may make losing your hair feel real for the first time. The wig specialists will understand your feelings and will do all they can to make you feel comfortable during your fitting.

If all your hair has fallen out and the wig is slipping, you can get sticky pads to hold it in place. Some pads are hypoallergenic, which means they are less likely to cause a skin reaction. These can be helpful if your skin is sensitive due to chemotherapy or radiotherapy.

We have a video on our website that shows you how to choose a wig that works for you. It tells you how you can style it to make it feel more natural. Visit [macmillan.org.uk/hairloss](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/hairloss)

# Paying for a wig

## NHS and Health Service wigs

Synthetic wigs are free on prescription for everyone in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. There are special arrangements for patients who are registered with GPs in Wales but have treatment in England.

You can also qualify for a free NHS wig in England if:

- you are under 16, or under 19 and in full-time education
- you are a hospital inpatient
- your weekly income is low
- you claim any of the following benefits:
  - Income Support
  - the guarantee element of Pension Credit
  - income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
  - income-related Employment and Support Allowance
  - Universal Credit
- you have a valid NHS tax exemption certificate
- you are named on a valid 'help with health costs' (HC2) certificate.

If you are entitled to a free wig, you will need to tell the person who fits it that you can get it free of charge. You will need to show proof that you qualify, for example the letter showing which benefits you receive.

If you do not qualify for a free wig, you may be able to reclaim the value added tax (VAT) on these items.

## Applying for an NHS wig

To apply for a free wig or partial help towards the cost of a wig, you will need to complete an HC1 form. This is available from your local Jobcentre or the staff at the hospital. You can also request a form by calling the NHS Help with health costs number on **0300 123 0849**. Your income will be assessed and, if you are entitled to help, you will either be sent an HC2 full-help certificate or HC3 partial-help certificate.

There are no nationally set limits on the number of wigs a person can have from the NHS. But local NHS organisations (individual hospitals) may set their own limits.

Human-hair wigs cannot be prescribed on the NHS, unless you are allergic to synthetic wigs or have a skin condition that may be made worse by a synthetic wig.

If you do not qualify for a free wig based on the conditions we mention here, some hospitals may still provide you with a free wig, or one at a discounted price. Speak to your healthcare team for more information.

## Other financial help

You may be able to apply for grants and benefits from other organisations or charities to help pay for a wig.

We give one-off grants to help people with cancer that can be used towards the cost of a wig. You need to apply through a health or social care professional, such as a district nurse, social worker or a Macmillan nurse, if you have one.

Call our cancer support specialists on **0808 808 00 00** to find out more about Macmillan Grants. You can also find out what other benefits you might be entitled to.

## Children and young people

The Little Princess Trust is an organisation that offers free, human-hair wigs to children and young people up to the age of 24. See page 98 for contact details.

We have more information about wigs for teenagers on page 63.

## Wig banks

A charity called Wig Bank collects wigs that people no longer need, cleans them and sells them at a discounted rate. There are Wig Bank services available in different parts of the UK. Visit **wigbank.com** to find out more and shop online.



## Buying a wig or hairpiece privately

Some people can afford to buy a wig privately. It may then be possible to get one that looks more natural, and it may also suit their hairstyle and texture better.

If you want to buy a wig or hairpiece privately, you can get them from the following places:

- Wig sections in department stores. Remember that not all wig departments have a private area where you can try on a wig. You may want to check this before going to the store.
- A wig manufacturer.
- A specialist wig shop.

You should not have to pay VAT on wigs or hairpieces when your hair loss is caused by cancer treatment. But not all wig suppliers offer this service, so check before you buy from them. If they do offer the service, you will need to fill in a VAT exemption form, which the shop should give you when you buy the wig. The tax cannot be claimed back at a later date.

For more information, contact HMRC on **0300 123 1073** or visit **[gov.uk/financial-help-disabled/vat-relief](https://www.gov.uk/financial-help-disabled/vat-relief)**

## Tips for wearing your wig

A common worry people may have is how to keep a wig in place. Although a well-fitting wig should stay in place on its own, here are some tips to give you extra confidence that your wig is secure:

- Use double-sided tape. Wig specialists have hypoallergenic tape that does not irritate the skin. The tape is attached to the underside of the wig and gives a secure but comfortable bond. Surgical spirit can be used to remove any leftover adhesive. Your skin may be very sensitive due to your cancer treatment. Ask your doctor or specialist nurse which tape you can use and whether it is okay to use surgical spirit.
- If you still have some of your own hair, or if it is growing back, it may be possible to keep your wig or hairpiece in place by using special clips in various hair colours. The wig specialist can advise you about this.
- Bend over and shake your head to check your wig or hairpiece is securely in place.
- If it is windy outside, wear a hat or scarf to help secure your wig.
- If you are going to see the doctor for a check-up, wear something that is easy to take off, such as a cardigan or shirt. This is also a good idea when you are shopping and know that you will be trying on clothes.

## Wearing your wig in public for the first time

When you wear your wig in public for the first time, you may want to wear it when you are with people you know well. This can help you feel more confident and gives you the chance to gradually prepare yourself for wearing the wig with people you do not know.

## Protecting your scalp

The lining of the wig can irritate the scalp, so it may be helpful to wear a thin, cotton wig liner underneath. These are usually available from wig suppliers. They can sometimes make a wig move around more, so you may need to experiment to find out what works best for you.

Remember that your scalp may sweat more when you wear a wig, so you will need to wash the wig and liner as advised by the wig specialist.

## Safety

Take care not to expose your wig to a flame, for example from a candle or gas cooker. Real hair will frizz and synthetic hair can melt. Even the heat that comes out when you open an oven door can make the hair frizzy. Do not use the highest heat setting on your hairdryer, as this can also melt the hair.

## Changes to the wig

If you want to change the style or cut it shorter, check your hairdresser is trained to cut wigs. Visit [mynewhair.org](http://mynewhair.org) to look for salons in your area.

## Looking after your wig

The supplier should give you tips about looking after your wig. Both synthetic and human-hair wigs need to be washed carefully, using slightly warm or cold water. You can also use special shampoos. The charity Cancer Hair Care has more information – visit [cancerhaircare.com](http://cancerhaircare.com)



## Tips to stay cool while wearing your wig or hairpiece

Many people do not want to wear a wig as they think it will be hot. But there are now wigs that have finer and lighter meshes. Ask your hair supplier for more information.

The following tips can help you to stay cool while wearing a wig:

- Choose a man-made (synthetic) wig. They are often lighter than human-hair wigs.
- Wear a cotton wig liner on your scalp to absorb moisture and heat.
- Wash the wig and liner as advised by the wig specialist.
- Use a wet cloth or an alcohol-free, unscented spray to freshen your scalp throughout the day.
- Whenever possible, for example at home, take the wig off to let air around your scalp.



**'My hair grows so slowly now that I've had to keep it short. Luckily, I think it suits me. It certainly saves me money at the hairdressers!'**

**Penny**

# WHEN YOUR HAIR GROWS BACK

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## As your hair grows back

Some people believe massaging or rubbing their scalp will help their hair to grow faster. This can damage new hair growth and you should avoid it.

Having your hair styled by a hairdresser who knows you and understands your situation can be very helpful. Often people who were used to long hair find that a shorter style suits them. Your hairdresser can help you choose a style that suits you. Visit [mynewhair.org](https://mynewhair.org) to search for salons near you that are trained to support people affected by cancer.

As soon as your hair is long enough, you may no longer want to wear a wig or head covering. If you have a wig, you may be interested in giving it to a charity called Wig Bank, which cleans wigs and resells them for a low price (see page 98 for contact details).

'Now that my hair has grown back, there are so many positives. I love short hair and it's so easy to manage.'

**Lurline**



# Hair styling and hair dyes

## Hair products

As your hair grows back, you can use shampoo and styling products that suit your hair or scalp condition. Special products are available for Afro-Caribbean hair and other hair types. Most shampoos and styling products can be used on a regular, daily basis without any problems. If you notice that your scalp becomes irritated or the condition of your hair changes, seek professional advice.

## Colouring, perming and relaxing

Once your hair is about 3 inches (7.5cm) long, and your scalp is in a healthy condition, you can have your hair tinted, permed or chemically relaxed.

It is best to seek professional advice before you have your hair tinted, permed or chemically relaxed after cancer treatment. Your hair and scalp can react differently, so it is very important to carry out strand and skin sensitivity tests. This is needed even if the same hairdresser is using the same chemicals that were used before cancer treatment.

A professional hairdresser can do tests to check that any chemicals used on your hair will not damage it or cause an allergic reaction on your scalp. They can also advise you about how to care for your hair after colouring or perming it.

You should not use any chemicals on your hair without talking to a professional if:

- your scalp is scaly, sore or irritated
- your hair is drier than usual
- your hair is lighter in colour than it was before your treatment
- your hair is breaking or not growing normally.

## Colouring your own hair

If you want to colour your hair yourself, ask your hairdresser for advice. They may suggest vegetable or plant-based dyes, which are more gentle on your hair and scalp than dyes containing chemicals.

Always try the colour on a small, hidden area of hair and scalp 48 hours before applying it to the rest of your hair. This is to make sure colours will not damage your hair or cause an allergic reaction to them. You should do this even if you have used the same product before. If you do not have any problems with the colour test within 48 hours, it is safe to apply it to the rest of your hair.

It is important to know that many products that claim to be natural actually contain chemicals that may occasionally cause an allergic reaction. This often includes henna products. Unless the henna is bright red, it will have other forms of tint added to it. It is best to avoid henna products. If you do use a henna product, the colour the henna produces may be more intense after chemotherapy treatment.

If you are colouring your hair at home, always carefully read and follow the instructions. If you want a permanent colour with highlights and lowlights, it is best if a trained hairdresser does this.

## **Hair extensions**

Hair extensions can thicken fine or wispy hair and can be clipped on to your own hair. However, they can cause damage, even to healthy hair, so are not suitable for weak or thin hair. Hair extensions are not available on the NHS.

## **Looking after your hair**

Your hair may be dry or break easily even after cancer treatment has finished. Read our tips for looking after your hair on pages 42 to 43.



# FURTHER INFORMATION

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# About our information

We provide expert, up-to-date information about cancer. And all our information is free for everyone.

## Order what you need

You may want to order more leaflets or booklets like this one. Visit **be.macmillan.org.uk** or call us on **0808 808 00 00**.

We have booklets on different cancer types, treatments and side effects. We also have information about work, financial issues, diet, life after cancer and information for carers, family and friends.

## Online information

All of our information is also available at **macmillan.org.uk/information-and-support**

There you'll also find videos featuring real-life stories from people affected by cancer, and information from health and social care professionals.

## Other formats

We also provide information in different languages and formats, including:

- audiobooks
- Braille
- British Sign Language
- easy read booklets
- eBooks
- large print
- translations.

Find out more at **macmillan.org.uk/otherformats**

If you'd like us to produce information in a different format for you, email us at **cancerinformationteam@macmillan.org.uk** or call us on **0808 808 00 00**.

## Help us improve our information

We know that the people who use our information are the real experts. That's why we always involve them in our work. If you've been affected by cancer, you can help us improve our information.

We give you the chance to comment on a variety of information including booklets, leaflets and fact sheets.

If you'd like to hear more about becoming a reviewer, email [reviewing@macmillan.org.uk](mailto:reviewing@macmillan.org.uk) You can get involved from home whenever you like, and we don't ask for any special skills – just an interest in our cancer information.



# Other ways we can help you

At Macmillan, we know how a cancer diagnosis can affect everything, and we're here to support you.

## Talk to us

If you or someone you know is affected by cancer, talking about how you feel and sharing your concerns can really help.

### Macmillan Support Line

Our free, confidential phone line is open 7 days a week, 8am to 8pm. Our cancer support specialists can:

- help with any medical questions you have about cancer or your treatment
- help you access benefits and give you financial guidance
- be there to listen if you need someone to talk to
- tell you about services that can help you in your area.

Call us on **0808 808 00 00** or email us via our website, **[macmillan.org.uk/talktous](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/talktous)**

## Information centres

Our information and support centres are based in hospitals, libraries and mobile centres. There, you can speak with someone face to face.

Visit one to get the information you need, or if you'd like a private chat, most centres have a room where you can speak with someone alone and in confidence.

Find your nearest centre at **[macmillan.org.uk/informationcentres](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/informationcentres)** or call us on **0808 808 00 00**.



## Talk to others

No one knows more about the impact cancer can have on your life than those who have been through it themselves. That's why we help to bring people together in their communities and online.

## Support groups

Whether you are someone living with cancer or a carer, we can help you find support in your local area, so you can speak face to face with people who understand. Find out about support groups in your area by calling us or by visiting [macmillan.org.uk/selfhelpandsupport](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/selfhelpandsupport)

## Online Community

Thousands of people use our Online Community to make friends, blog about their experiences and join groups to meet other people going through the same things. You can access it any time of day or night. Share your experiences, ask questions, or just read through people's posts at [macmillan.org.uk/community](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/community)

## The Macmillan healthcare team

Our nurses, doctors and other health and social care professionals give expert care and support to individuals and their families. Call us or ask your GP, consultant, district nurse or hospital ward sister if there are any Macmillan professionals near you.

'Everyone is so supportive on the Online Community, they know exactly what you're going through. It can be fun too. It's not all just chats about cancer.'

Mal

## Help with money worries

Having cancer can bring extra costs such as hospital parking, travel fares and higher heating bills. If you've been affected in this way, we can help.

### Financial guidance

Our financial team can give you guidance on mortgages, pensions, insurance, borrowing and savings.

### Help accessing benefits

Our benefits advisers can offer advice and information on benefits, tax credits, grants and loans. They can help you work out what financial help you could be entitled to. They can also help you complete your forms and apply for benefits.

### Macmillan Grants

Macmillan offers one-off payments to people with cancer. A grant can be for anything from heating bills or extra clothing to a much-needed break.

Call us on **0808 808 00 00** to speak to a financial guide or benefits adviser, or to find out more about Macmillan Grants. We can also tell you about benefits advisers in your area. Visit **[macmillan.org.uk/financialsupport](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/financialsupport)** to find out more about how we can help you with your finances.

## Help with work and cancer

Whether you're an employee, a carer, an employer or are self-employed, we can provide support and information to help you manage cancer at work. Visit **[macmillan.org.uk/work](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/work)**

### My Organiser app

Our free mobile app can help you manage your treatment, from appointment times and contact details, to reminders for when to take your medication. Search 'My Organiser' on the Apple App Store or Google Play on your phone.

# Other useful organisations

There are lots of other organisations that can give you information or support.

## Support for people with hair loss

### Look Good Feel Better

**Tel** 01372 747 500

**Email** [info@lgfb.co.uk](mailto:info@lgfb.co.uk)

**www.**

**[lookgoodfeelbetter.co.uk](http://lookgoodfeelbetter.co.uk)**

A support service for women living with cancer. Holds free skincare and make-up workshops to help women cope with the visible side effects of cancer treatment.

### Look Good Feel Better For Men

**[www.lookgoodfeelbetterformen.org](http://www.lookgoodfeelbetterformen.org)**

Has tips to help men deal with the side effects of cancer treatments on hair, skin, body and mind.

### Teenage Cancer Trust

**Tel** 020 7612 0370

**Email** [hello@](mailto:hello@teenagecancertrust.org)

[teenagecancertrust.org](http://teenagecancertrust.org)

**[www.teenagecancertrust.org](http://www.teenagecancertrust.org)**

Provides support and information for young people with cancer, their families, schools and health professionals.

## Specialist hair and wig services

### **Little Princess Trust**

**Tel** 01432 760 060

**Email**

info@littleprincesses.org.uk

**www.**

**littleprincesses.org.uk**

Provides free, human-hair wigs to children affected by hair loss due to cancer treatment. Also provides a personal fitting and styling service.

### **mynewhair – Trevor Sorbie**

**Email** info@mynewhair.org

**www.mynewhair.org**

The website has a list of recommended salons that have been trained to offer expert advice and styling to make your wig individual to you. Contact the salons directly for specific prices. All consultations are free and some salons offer their service for free.

## Wig Bank

**www.wigbank.com**

The website has a list of wig banks around the UK offering donated wigs for sale and hire. You can also order wigs for home delivery on the website.

## Local hair loss services and wig suppliers

You can search online for services and suppliers in your local area. Or you can ask your nurse for more information about what is available.

You can talk to our cancer support specialists on **0808 808 00 00** if you are finding it hard to cope with hair loss or other aspects of cancer and its treatment. They can also give you information about what support is available in your area.



You can search for more organisations on our website at [macmillan.org.uk/organisations](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/organisations) or call us on **0808 808 00 00**.

# YOUR NOTES AND QUESTIONS

A series of horizontal green lines spaced evenly down the page, intended for writing notes and questions.

## Disclaimer

We make every effort to ensure that the information we provide is accurate and up to date but it should not be relied upon as a substitute for specialist professional advice tailored to your situation. So far as is permitted by law, Macmillan does not accept liability in relation to the use of any information contained in this publication, or third-party information or websites included or referred to in it. Some photos are of models.

## Thanks

This booklet has been written, revised and edited by Macmillan Cancer Support's Cancer Information Development team. It has been approved by our Chief Medical Editor, Dr Tim Iveson, Macmillan Consultant Medical Oncologist.

With thanks to: Charlotte Bloodworth, Haematology Clinical Nurse Specialist; and Jean Gilkes, Cancer Black Care.

With special thanks to: Glenn Lyons, Senior Consultant Trichologist and Clinical Director at the Philip Kingsley Trichological Clinic.

Thanks also to the people affected by cancer who reviewed this edition, and those who shared their stories.

We welcome feedback on our information. If you have any, please contact **[cancerinformationteam@macmillan.org.uk](mailto:cancerinformationteam@macmillan.org.uk)**

## Sources

We've listed a sample of the sources used in the booklet below. If you would like further information about the sources we use, please contact us at **[cancerinformationteam@macmillan.org.uk](mailto:cancerinformationteam@macmillan.org.uk)**

Breastcancer.org website. Why and how hair loss happens. Available from: [www.breastcancer.org/tips/hair\\_skin\\_nails/hair\\_loss](http://www.breastcancer.org/tips/hair_skin_nails/hair_loss) (accessed April 2017).

Cancer Hair Care website. [www.cancerhaircare.com](http://www.cancerhaircare.com) (accessed May 2017).

Dua P, et al. Cancer-related hair loss: a selective review of the alopecia research literature. 2015. Available from: [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/26594010](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/26594010) (accessed May 2017).

Look Good Feel Better For Men website. [www.lookgoodfeelbetterformen.org](http://www.lookgoodfeelbetterformen.org) (accessed July 2017).

NHS Choices. Cancer and hair loss. Available from:

[www.nhs.uk/livewell/cancer/pages/cancerandhairloss.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/livewell/cancer/pages/cancerandhairloss.aspx) (accessed May 2017).



# Can you do something to help?

We hope this booklet has been useful to you. It's just one of our many publications that are available free to anyone affected by cancer. They're produced by our cancer information specialists who, along with our nurses, benefits advisers, campaigners and volunteers, are part of the Macmillan team. When people are facing the toughest fight of their lives, we're there to support them every step of the way.

We want to make sure no one has to go through cancer alone, so we need more people to help us. When the time is right for you, here are some ways in which you can become a part of our team.



## **Share your cancer experience**

Support people living with cancer by telling your story, online, in the media or face to face.

## **Campaign for change**

We need your help to make sure everyone gets the right support. Take an action, big or small, for better cancer care.

## **Help someone in your community**

A lift to an appointment. Help with the shopping. Or just a cup of tea and a chat. Could you lend a hand?

## **Raise money**

Whatever you like doing you can raise money to help. Take part in one of our events or create your own.

## **Give money**

Big or small, every penny helps. To make a one-off donation see over.

**Call us to find out more**

**0300 1000 200**

**[macmillan.org.uk/getinvolved](http://macmillan.org.uk/getinvolved)**

**This booklet is about hair loss. It is for anyone coping with changes to their hair during and after cancer treatment. This booklet explains how cancer treatment may affect your hair, how to prepare for and cope with hair loss, and what to expect after treatment finishes.**

We're here to help everyone with cancer live life as fully as they can, providing physical, financial and emotional support. So whatever cancer throws your way, we're right there with you. For information, support or just someone to talk to, call **0808 808 00 00** or visit **macmillan.org.uk**

Would you prefer to speak to us in another language? Interpreters are available. Please tell us in English the language you would like to use. Are you deaf or hard of hearing? Call us using NGT (Text Relay) on **18001 0808 808 00 00**, or use the NGT Lite app.

Need information in different languages or formats? We produce information in audio, eBooks, easy read, Braille, large print and translations. To order these, visit **macmillan.org.uk/otherformats** or call our support line.

**MACMILLAN**  
**CANCER SUPPORT**  
**RIGHT THERE WITH YOU**

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What's this logo? Visit [macmillan.org.uk/ourinformation](http://macmillan.org.uk/ourinformation)

## Please fill in your personal details

Mr/Mrs/Miss/Other \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Surname \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_  
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Postcode \_\_\_\_\_

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Email \_\_\_\_\_

Please accept my gift of £ \_\_\_\_\_

(Please delete as appropriate)

I enclose a cheque / postal order /  
Charity Voucher made payable to  
Macmillan Cancer Support

OR debit my:

Visa / MasterCard / CAF Charity  
Card / Switch / Maestro

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Date     /     / \_\_\_\_\_

## Don't let the taxman keep your money

Do you pay tax? If so, your gift will be worth 25% more to us – at no extra cost to you. All you have to do is tick the box below, and the tax office will give 25p for every pound you give.

- I am a UK tax payer and I would like Macmillan Cancer Support to treat all donations I make or have made to Macmillan Cancer Support in the last 4 years as Gift Aid donations, until I notify you otherwise.

I understand that if I pay less Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax than the amount of Gift Aid claimed on all my donations in that tax year it is my responsibility to pay any difference. I understand Macmillan Cancer Support will reclaim 25p of tax on every £1 that I give.

Macmillan Cancer Support and our trading companies would like to hold your details in order to contact you about our fundraising, campaigning and services for people affected by cancer. If you would prefer us not to use your details in this way please tick this box.

In order to carry out our work we may need to pass your details to agents or partners who act on our behalf.



If you'd rather donate online go to [macmillan.org.uk/donate](https://macmillan.org.uk/donate)

Please cut out this form and return it in an envelope (no stamp required) to:  
Supporter Donations, Macmillan Cancer Support, FREEPOST LON15851,  
89 Albert Embankment, London SE1 7UQ