

# Hair Loss

Ivy Phillips has been fighting cancer off-and-on for nearly a decade.

*"So, I am on one pill a day, and a 30-minute infusion that I do every other week; and this will continue indefinitely"* - Ivy, Patient

Over the years, Ivy has dealt with a number of side effects such as fatigue, nausea, and pain but she says one has been especially tough to handle:

*"For me, personally, losing my hair was extremely traumatic."* - Ivy, Patient

Hair loss is a side effect of many forms of cancer treatment. But it is most commonly associated with chemotherapy.

That's because chemo medications cannot tell the difference between the rapidly-dividing cells that cause cancer and other cells that divide quickly – but are healthy and normal such as those in your hair follicles.

*"Hair loss is difficult for patients, because it is clearly the most visible sign that you're getting cancer treatment."*  
- Stephanie Blank, MD, Oncologist

*"I always felt like - if I felt sick but I looked normal, I could blend in. But if I felt sick and looked sick, it was, like, even worse – because I didn't have any hair. I didn't have any eyebrows, and I didn't have any eyelashes."* - Ivy, Patient

*"Stacy, Christy, Marianne and I...."* – Miranda, Patient

Some treatments can cause you to lose most - or all - of your body hair.

Others affect only the hair on your head. And some treatments do not affect your hair..... at all.

*"If you're on a chemotherapy that you would expect to cause hair loss and you haven't lost your hair yet, it doesn't mean the chemo is not working."* - Stephanie Blank, MD, Oncologist

If your treatment is going to cause hair loss, you will likely see the first signs about two weeks in. You may find a few hairs on your pillow, or in the shower drain.

Shortly after, your hair will likely start coming out in clumps.

This can be disconcerting at first, so you may want to talk to your care team about it.

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*"Sometimes people don't want to mention that it is upsetting to them - because they're dealing with cancer, and hair loss might seem minor in comparison to cancer. But it is a real side effect, and you're allowed to not want to lose your hair." - Stephanie Blank, MD, Oncologist*

Wearing a wig is one of the most common ways to deal with hair loss.

If possible, buy your wig *before* you start treatment so you can match your natural hair color and style as closely as possible...

Other options include: bandanas, scarves, and head wraps – as well as hair nets - wearing one overnight may help stop hair from coming out in clumps.

As Ivy did, you can also cut your hair very short or shave your scalp.

*"I was just like, let me get in front of the problem. Let me shave it, you know, down." - Ivy, Patient*

Hair loss cannot be prevented. But a device called a cooling cap, which is available at some cancer centers, may reduce it.

It makes the scalp ice-cold, which constricts the blood vessels underneath.

*"That restricts blood flow to the scalp and therefore less chemotherapy is delivered to the scalp in hopes of sparing the hair follicles." - Stephanie Blank, MD, Oncologist*

But the treatment *can* have side effects. So talk to your provider about the pros and cons.

Another way to deal with hair loss is to look beyond it.

A program known as "look good, feel better" helps women do that by offering beauty tips to help them look their best.

*"Women are taught to do their make up a little differently so as to enhance their features -maybe to have a different feature that is as prominent as a head of hair. Sometimes women use different make up, or wear different earrings. I had a patient who Henna'd her head, there's different things that people can do." - Stephanie Blank, MD, Oncologist*

However you handle it, keep in mind that hair loss is nothing to be ashamed of and it's only temporary.

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*"Hair loss is difficult – but remember why you're going through it: you're going through it to treat something that's dangerous, so it is something that you are willing to go through, to treat your cancer."* - Stephanie Blank, MD, Oncologist

*"I got through it. I got through it. It wasn't easy – but I got through it."* - Ivy, Patient