Hair Loss and Cancer Treatment

The information in this factsheet will help you understand more about hair loss and cancer treatment. It is an agreed view on this condition by medical experts. We hope it answers some questions and concerns that you may have. For more information, contact the National Cancer Helpline on 1800 200 700.

**What is hair loss?**

In a normal scalp there are about 100,000 hairs. These are constantly growing with old hairs falling out and being replaced by new ones. When an excessive amount of hair falls out over time, it is called alopecia.

It is normal to be upset and distressed about hair loss. But it can help to know why it happens and also to know that your hair will grow back again. In the meantime there are ways to lessen the problem for you.
What causes hair loss?

Some cancer treatments can cause hair loss. These include chemotherapy and radiotherapy. Treatment can damage the hair follicles, causing the hair to fall out and preventing new hairs from growing.

This hair loss is usually temporary and once the course of treatment is over, your hair will grow again within a short space of time. Your doctor and nurse will tell you if you are likely to have hair loss due to treatment.

What types of treatment cause hair loss?

1. **Chemotherapy:** The amount of hair lost will usually depend on the type of drug or drugs used, the dose given, and your individual reaction to the drug. There are many kinds of drugs used in chemotherapy. Some of these will cause total hair loss, while others cause some hair loss. This can vary from a little thinning of your hair to greater hair loss. Other drugs cause hardly any hair loss at all. Even if it does not cause actual hair loss, chemotherapy can still damage your hair and make it brittle.

2. **Radiotherapy:** Hair loss due to radiotherapy depends on which area of your body is being treated. Radiotherapy to the head often causes scalp hair loss. Depending on the dose of radiation to your head, your hair may have changed in colour and texture when it grows back. Some hormone therapies or biological therapies can cause hair thinning. Usually this is quite mild and may not even be noticeable.

Can hair loss be prevented?

In general you cannot prevent hair loss entirely. But for some patients having certain types of chemotherapy, it may be possible to reduce or delay hair loss by using a ‘cold cap’. This is also known as scalp cooling. The treatment reduces blood flowing to your scalp for a short period so less of the drug reaches your scalp.

While it can reduce the risk of hair loss, it does not always prevent it. The cold cap only blocks the action of certain drugs as well. It is also not suitable for all patients and not all hospitals offer this kind of treatment. Ask your doctor or nurse if it would be useful for you.

How soon will my hair fall out?

If hair loss does occur, it usually happens within a few weeks of the start of treatment. It can help to have your hair cut short before treatment or soon after it begins. The weight of long hair can pull on your scalp and may make your hair fall out faster.

You may experience tingling or sensitivity of your scalp just before your hair starts to fall out. This is normal and may last a few days. Hair loss when it happens is usually gradual. It can fall out in clumps when shampooing or brushing. Sometimes you may find clumps of hair on your pillow or on your hairbrush. At this time, you might prefer to shave off your hair entirely. Most hairpiece suppliers provide this service. Underarm, body and pubic hair may be lost as well. Some drugs also cause loss of your eyelashes and eyebrows.
### How should I care for my hair during treatment?

Your scalp may feel very sensitive to washing, combing or brushing during the short time when your hair is actually falling out.

- Brush or comb your hair gently – use a soft or baby brush.
- Use gentle hair products.
- Use a gentle unperfumed moisturiser on your scalp if it becomes dry or itchy. Natural oils such as almond oil or olive oil are suitable.
- Avoid using a hair straightener, curling tongs or heated rollers.
- Pat your hair gently after washing it. If using a hairdryer, keep it on low to moderate heat only.
- Do not perm or straighten your hair during chemotherapy.
- It is best not to colour your hair during treatment but ask your hairdresser for more advice.

### When will my hair grow back?

Usually hair grows back within a few weeks of finishing treatment. In some cases, it can start to regrow even before treatment has finished. After about 5 or 6 months, you should have a full covering of hair on your head. When it does grow back, it can often be a different texture, style or colour. You may notice it is thicker and darker in colour. At first, fine downy hair appears on your scalp and then stronger hair develops. It grows at about half an inch each month.

### Emotional and psychological effects of hair loss

It is natural to feel upset at the thought of losing your hair. For some people this can be one of the hardest things to cope with during treatment. You may feel that by losing your hair you are also losing your identity. Do not be afraid to talk to your cancer nurse or medical social worker about your feelings.

If your hospital does not have a medical social worker, your healthcare team can still give you advice and help arrange further emotional or psychological support if needed. If you prefer, you can also contact the National Cancer Helpline on 1800 200 700.

At the hospital, your nurse or a member of your healthcare team can advise you about where to go locally for your wig or hairpiece. Having a hairpiece that matches the colour, texture, style and shape of your own hair can make you feel more like yourself. There is a list of nationwide suppliers at the end of this factsheet.

#### Other people’s reactions

Who you tell about your hair loss is an individual choice. Some people tell family and close friends, while others are comfortable to tell everyone. This decision may be affected by what type of headwear you choose to wear. For example, if you choose to wear scarves instead of a wig, your hair loss will be more obvious.

People will respond to your hair loss in different ways. Sometimes their reactions can be hard to deal with. Usually most people are very supportive but sometimes there are others who can unintentionally say things that are unhelpful and even hurtful. It can help to be prepared for any kind of reaction. In fact, some people may just think you have a new hairstyle. Think about what you will say and to whom. The decision is yours but try not to withdraw from your social life and your friends because of your hair loss.

#### Preparing children

If you have children of any age, you may wonder how and what to tell them. In general, children are less frightened when they know what is going on, even if they do not fully understand it. Despite it being difficult, talking to your children about your cancer will be helpful to all of you. It can

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helpline@irishcancer.ie
prepare them for what to expect. It may help to explain that your hair will grow back and what you plan to wear while it is gone.

Children will react differently and some may find it upsetting to see you without your hair. But talking about it openly in your home will help them feel more secure. A special booklet called *Talking to Children about Cancer: A Guide for Parents* is available from the Irish Cancer Society. Call 1800 200 700 for a free copy or download it from [www.cancer.ie](http://www.cancer.ie)

### Changing the emphasis and creating a new look

You can also get help and advice from the Look Good Feel Better programmes. These are run regularly in hospitals. The oncology unit can usually give you the telephone number of the contact person at your hospital.

Some general advice includes drawing attention away from your hair and towards your clothes and accessories. Wearing a bright-coloured top or attractive jewellery, bags or shoes can help redirect the focus and boost your confidence.

### Eyebrow and eyelashes

Hair loss can also occur in your eyebrows and eyelashes. Some people get thinning or complete loss of both. Others do not lose their eyebrows or eyelashes at all. If you do lose them, they can take between 6 months and a year to grow back. Eyelash loss can occur at any time but is more usual towards the end of treatment. Surprisingly, it can also occur after treatment has finished.

If you get thinning or hair loss of your eyebrows, you can use eyebrow products to help recreate your natural shape. There are many different products ranging from pencils to powders and also stencils that can be a useful guide. Advice is available from the cosmetic counters of department stores or more privately from your local beautician.

Losing your eyelashes can affect how you look and feel. If your eyes cannot be protected by your eyelashes, they can become sore and uncomfortable. If this happens, speak to your cancer nurse about using eyedrops or not. She will advise you, depending on your treatment. You can use eyeliner along the top of your eyelid to define your eye, which can work well. It is best to choose hypoallergenic eye products and have strict hygiene with the products to avoid the risk of infection.

### What are hairpieces made of?

Wigs and hairpieces are made of either manmade fibres or real human hair. There are advantages and disadvantages to each type, so neither one is better than the other. It often comes down to personal preference. Fibre wigs can come in a huge variety of styles and colours and are easier to care for in general. But they may not have a ‘natural’ look and need to be replaced more often. Human hair looks more natural and can last longer but is more expensive. These wigs need more care than fibre wigs and must be styled after every wash.

### Where can I buy a hairpiece?

There is a list of nationwide suppliers at the end of this factsheet. Choose a wig supplier that has a special fitting service and a good selection of wigs. It helps if you are given plenty of time to fit on the wigs in a private room with lots of natural light. If you are unable to visit their shop, some wig suppliers offer home and hospital fittings too. Some can arrange to cut your hair before, during or after treatment and will advise you on aftercare.
How much do hairpieces cost?

The price of wigs and hairpieces can vary a good deal from company to company. The average price of a synthetic wig is between €350 and €500. For human hair, it can vary between €600 and €1000 and even higher. When checking prices, it is always good to shop around.

If I don’t want a hairpiece, what else can I wear?

There are many other types of headwear available. You can choose from scarves, bandanas, turbans and soft hats. There is also headwear for night-time wear that can be worn for warmth and comfort in bed. Thin-quilted cotton headliners are also available. These give height and shape when worn under hats and scarves.

Alternative headwear is now available at hairpiece suppliers or online that is both comfortable and attractive. Cotton headwear tends to stay on a smooth scalp much better than polyester or nylon.

If you feel that your face looks bare, there are also hair fringes, plaited braids and face-framers that can be worn with headwear to give the effect of hair beneath.

If you decide not to cover your head, make sure you apply a very high protection sunscreen at all times.

Advice for choosing a hairpiece

- Bring a friend or relative with you to the wig supplier, preferably one that is interested in helping you find a hairpiece that suits you best.
- Visit a supplier before you lose your hair, even if you are not sure you will need or want a hairpiece. That way you can get as close a match to the colour and texture of your own hair. If this is not possible, bring a recent photograph of your full head of hair.
- Give yourself plenty of time to decide on a hairpiece that suits you best. If you are unsure, leave it and come back a second time.

Can I get financial help when buying a hairpiece?

Usually you are only entitled to free hairpieces if you have a medical card. If you experience hardship due to your cancer diagnosis, you can apply to the Irish Cancer Society for financial aid grants. The application forms are available from the medical social worker at the hospital.

- Medical card holders: If you have a medical card, you are entitled to 1–2 free or subsidised hairpieces every year. The subsidy can vary and will depend on the Health Service Executive (HSE) area in which you live. Some HSE areas will give you a refund of up to three-quarters the cost of the wig, if you have a receipt of purchase. Before buying the wig, your cancer nurse can give you a letter saying the wig is for medical reasons. The medical social worker can also give you more information on your entitlements.

- No health cover: If you do not have a medical card or private insurance, you can claim tax back on any hairpieces you buy. Because hairpieces are regarded as a medical expense, you must fill in the MED1 form when claiming. For more details, contact your local tax office (Revenue Commissioners).

- Medical insurance: Contact your health insurer for full details on your own medical cover. Some health insurers will cover a certain amount of the cost of a hairpiece, depending on the type of cover you have. If your insurance does not cover the cost, you can claim it back as a medical expense on the MED1 form.
Caring for your hair when it grows back

Treat your hair gently when it grows back. Use a soft brush and baby shampoo for the first 6 months or until there is good growth.

After chemotherapy or radiotherapy, your hair may take a while to get back to its normal condition. It is best to wait for at least 6 months after treatment before colouring or perming your hair. Once it is long enough and your hair and scalp are in good condition, you can tint or perm it.

Do not colour your hair if your scalp is scaly, sore, irritated, or if your hair is drier than usual or rough to the touch. Speak to your hairdresser before you colour your hair for the first time after treatment.

You could ask him or her about natural products such as henna and non-chemical colours. For example, vegetable-based products may be less harsh. Test the dye on a small, hidden area of hair first to make sure it will not damage your hair.

A very small number of people have problems with hair regrowth after chemotherapy. If you are one of these, you could seek the advice of a trichologist. A trichologist is qualified to diagnose and treat hair and scalp disorders and diseases. A list of trichologists is provided at the end of this factsheet.

Donating hair

Sometimes the friends and relatives of those with cancer decide to donate their hair for wigs for other patients with hair loss. The following organisations can help.

Freedom Wigs

This worldwide organisation accepts hair donations for making wigs. These wigs are for children and adults suffering from long-term hair loss. The company uses only untreated hair to give a natural look. The wigs stick onto the head by suction so the wearer can enjoy sports and other activities without worrying about the wig coming off.

Contact: Audrey O’Hara, Dublin
Tel: 01 838 4640
Mobile: 087 972 7298
Email: freedomwigs@gmail.com
Website: www.freedomwigs.com

The Rapunzel Foundation

This charity was set up by Irish hairdresser Anna Furlong to give support to children and adults who experience long-term hair loss. Once Anna receives the hair donations, she sends them to Freedom Wigs. Her charity also offers funding towards the cost of a wig for those with hair loss conditions.

Contact: Anna Furlong, New Ross, Co Wexford
Tel: 051 421 287

Conditions for hair donation:

- Hair must be 10–12 inches long in a ponytail, from the nape of your neck.
- Hair should be in good condition, preferably the one length.

Hair donated to either Freedom Wigs or the Rapunzel Foundation is not used for making hair extensions.

LEINSTER WIG SUPPLIERS

Snips
113 Middle Abbey Street, Dublin 1
Tel: 01 873 3443 / 873 3251
Email: info@snipswigs.ie
Website: www.snipswigs.ie

Sak’s Wig Boutique,
15 Sackville Place, Dublin 1 (beside Clearys)
Tel: Anne O’Reilly at 01 878 6344
Mobile: 087 649 6716
Email: annereilly01@hotmail.com
Website: www.saks.ie

National Cancer Helpline: 1800 200 700
Velvet Wig and Hairpiece Specialists  
32 Lower Ormond Quay, Dublin 1  
Tel: 01 878 8940 / 01 878 8667  
Website: www.velvetbeauty.ie

Alan and Monica Harrop  
Suite 4, Fleet Chambers, 22 Fleet Street, Dublin 2  
Tel: 01 671 0911  
Email: harropwigs@gmail.com  
Website: www.harropwigs.com

Wigwam  
Lynda Murphy, 15C Ground Floor,  
St Stephen’s Green Shopping Centre, Dublin 2  
Tel: 01 478 1290  
Email: lynda_wigwam@hotmail.com  
Website: www.wigwam.ie

Confidence with Style  
Jennifer Foley, 63 Clontarf Road, Dublin 3  
Tel: 01 833 6942 / 086 385 3161  
Email: info@jenniferfoley.ie  
Website: www.jenniferfoley.ie

Roche’s Hair Solutions Ltd  
153 Lower Kimmage Road, Dublin 6W  
Tel: 01 492 6829 / 1890 948 734  
Email: deborah@hair4u.ie  
Website: www.hair4u.ie

Roche’s have a service at  
ARC Cancer Support Centre,  
South Circular Road, Dublin 8 (Weds)  
Tel: 01 707 8880  
ARC Cancer Support Centre, Eccles Street, Dublin 7  
Tel: 01 830 7333 (Fri)

Versacchi  
175 Lower Kimmage Road, Dublin 6W  
Tel: 01 490 0570  
Website: www.hairbeam.com

Volumize Ireland  
9 Greenmount House, Harold’s Cross Road,  
Dublin 6W  
Tel: 01 453 2459 / 087 799 6226  
Email: info@volumize.ie  
Website: www.volumize.ie

Evolve Ireland  
Unit 1, Seatown Business Campus,  
Swords, Co Dublin  
Tel: 01 840 0825  
Website: www.evolveireland.com

Pink Ribbon Wigs & Hair Solutions at Reputations Hair Design  
33 Johnstown Road, Dún Laoghaire, Co Dublin  
Tel: Eric, Sharon or Ann at 01 236 9857  
Email: info@pinkribbonwigs.ie  
Website: www.pinkribbonwigs.ie

Wigs by Rapunzel’s  
Carrick Street, Kells, Co Meath  
on Tues, Thurs, Fri: 10am to 5pm.  
Fittings at the Gary Kelly Cancer Support Centre,  
Drogheda, Co Louth on Mon: 10am to 1pm  
(except bank holidays).  
Tel: 046 929 3822 / 087 203 6607 / 041 980 5100  
Email: annemanuel@eircom.net  
Website: www.wigsbyrapunzels.ie

The Wig Clinic  
Miriam Moylette, 4 Garden Vale, Athlone,  
Co Westmeath  
Tel: 090 649 1716 / 086 838 5097  
Website: www.thewigclinic.ie

Maev O’Healy-Harte, MOHH Salon  
Arcadia Centre, Athlone, Co Westmeath  
Tel: 090 647 6166  
Email: info@mohh.ie

Wigs at Anna Furlong Hairdressing Salon  
53 South Street, New Ross, Co Wexford  
Tel: 051 421 287 / 051 420 508  
Email: annafurlonghairsalon@eircom.net

CONNAUGHT WIG SUPPLIERS

Deborah Whelan MIT  
1st Floor, 37 Eyre Street, Galway  
Tel: 091 565 148 or text 087 992 6114  
Email: enquiries@trichologist.ie  
Website: www.trichologist.ie

The Wig Clinic  
Miriam Moylette, Regional Medical Centre,  
34 Newcastle Road, Galway  
Tel: 091 583 638 / 086 838 5097  
Website: www.thewigclinic.ie

Wigs at Bellissimo  
Galway Retail Park, Galway  
Tel: 091 568 555  
Website: www.bellissimo.ie
Gruawig: Wig Sales and After Care
Louise Killeen, 23 Cashel Park, Castlebar, Co Mayo
Tel: 087 225 0704
Email: loulourogers@yahoo.co.uk

Marion Dineen’s Hair Studio
Unit 3, West Gardens, 20–21 High Street, Co Sligo
Tel: 071 914 2266
Website: www.mariandineenhairstudio.com

Wigs at Naturelle’s Hair Studio
1 Hyde Bridge, Co Sligo
Tel: 071 914 3030

MUNSTER WIG SUPPLIERS

Hair Retain
8 South Mall, Cork
Tel: 021 427 6474 / 086 220 2407
Email: info@hairretain.com
Website: www.hairretain.com

Wig Clinic
133 Barrack Street, Cork
11 Deal Yard Lane, Mallow, Cork
Boots Pharmacy, Wilton Shopping Centre, Cork
Boots Pharmacy, Mitchelstown Shopping Centre, Mitchelstown, Co Cork
Boots Pharmacy, 4–5 William Street, Limerick
Boots Pharmacy, Units 10–11, Deer Park Estate, Killarney, Co Kerry
Tel: 021 431 8468 / 086 062 1249
Email: info@wigclinic.com
Website: www.wigclinic.com

Wigs at Adore
129–130 Oliver Plunkett Street, Cork
Tel: 021 427 0031
Email: info@adore.ie
Website: www.adore.ie

Tranquility Hair Speciality Clinic
Rochestown Road, Cork
Tel: 021 436 2253
Email: info@hairscalpclinic.com
Website: www.hairscalpclinic.com

Versacchi
B Plaza #6, South Ring Business Park, Kinsale Road, Cork
Tel: 021 462 7400
Website: www.hairnurse.com

Wilton Hair and Beauty
Kevin Ryan, NT Dip., AIT
West End, Magazine Road, Cork
Tel: 021 434 4644 or 087 226 5625
Email: info@wigs4you.ie
Website: www.wigs4you.ie

Wigs4you at Roots Hair Design
Abbey Street Carpark, Ennis, Co Clare
Tel: 065 684 3333 / 086 061 0450
Email: info@wigs4you.ie
Website: www.wigs4you.ie

Changes Hair & Beauty Salon
97 Church Street, Listowel, Co Kerry
Tel: 068 23662

Bellissimo
Mount Kenneth Dock Road, Limerick
Tel: 061 317 541
Website: www.bellissimo.ie

Hair Retain
16 Davis Street, Limerick
Tel: 061 416 222
Mobile: 086 220 2407
Website: www.hairretain.com

Marbles Hair and Beauty Salon
35 Cruises Street, Limerick
Tel: 061 410 955

Wigs Medical
Bernie Murray, Viewmount House, Dunmore Road, Waterford (opp. Waterford Regional Hospital)
Tel: 051 879 651 / 086 389 7739
Email: bernie@wigsmedical.com
Website: www.wigsmedical.com

National Cancer Helpline: 1800 200 700
ULSTER WIG SUPPLIERS

Patrick Gildea
Church Lane, Letterkenny, Co Donegal
Tel: 086 236 6004
Email: info@patrickgildea.ie
Website: www.patrickgildea.ie

Hair Affair
86 Duke Street, Waterside, Derry
Tel: 048 7134 3636
Email: seamusjgallagher@hotmail.com
Website: www.hairaffairni.com

Galerus Wigs at Oliveen’s Salon
24 High Street, Draperstown,
Northern Ireland, BT45 7AA
Tel: 048 796 28325 / 0044 777 584 6325
Website: www.galeruswigs.com

Tresses Hairpiece Boutique
23 Upper Water Street, Newry,
Co Down BT34 1DJ
Tel: 048 3026 7925 (from Republic of Ireland)
Email: info@wigs-ireland.ie
Website: www.wigs-ireland.ie
Also at: 64 Lisburn Road, Belfast, BT9 6AF
Tel: 048 9033 2221 (from Republic of Ireland)
Tel: 028 3026 7925 (from Northern Ireland)
Fittings at the Gary Kelly Cancer Support Centre,
Drogheda, Co Louth on Mon: 10am to 1pm
(except bank holidays). Tel: 041 980 5100

Mail order suppliers of bandanas, turbans, scarves, etc.

AnnaBandana
Tel: 0044 121 357 3654 / 0044 7951 371 061
Website: www.annabandana.co.uk

BlueRoseWaterford
Tel: 058 60934
Email: info@bluerosewaterford.com
Website: www.bluerosewaterford.com

Bohemia Fashions Headwear
Tel: 0044 1582 750 083
Email: sales@bohemia-fashions.co.uk
Website: www.bohemia-fashions.co.uk

Feelgood Scarves
Catherine O’Sullivan, 11 Hawthorn Manor,
Newtown Park, Blackrock, Co Dublin
Tel: 086 021 2686
Email: info@feelgoodscarves.com
Website: www.feelgoodscarves.com

Ursula’s Headwear
Ursula Hanley
37 Beech Park, Athlone, Co Westmeath
Tel: 090 647 5462 / 086 389 9026
Email: hanleyursula@eircom.net
Website: www.headwear.ie

Trichologists in Ireland registered with the Institute of Trichologists (UK)

Dublin, Galway and Cork:
Deborah Whelan MIT
1st Floor, 37 Eyre Street, Galway
Free consultations for chemotherapy patients.
Tel: 091 565 148 or text 087 992 6114
Email: enquiries@trichologist.ie
Website: www.trichologist.ie

Dublin: Eoin Wright, MIT
Foundation Hair
18 Upper Stephen’s Street, Dublin 8
Tel: 01 478 1222 / 478 1223
Website: www.foundationhair.com

Cork: Kevin Ryan, NT Dip., AIT
Wilton Hair and Beauty
West End, Magazine Road, Cork
Tel: 021 434 4644 / 087 226 5625

Kildare: Gerrard Hynes, MIT
Runs satellite clinics on the east coast.
Tel: 086 199 9087
Email: gph@indigo.ie

Meath: Liam Byrne, MIT
Robert Byrne Hairdressing
5 Belfry View, Church Hill,
Navan, Co Meath
Tel: 046 902 1176

helpline@irishcancer.ie
USEFUL ORGANISATIONS

Dept of Social Protection – Information Service
LoCall: 1890 66 22 44
Email: info@welfare.ie
Website: www.welfare.ie

Heath Service Executive (HSE)
National information line: 1850 241 850
Email: info@hse.ie
Website: www.hse.ie

Look Good Feel Better
43/45 Northumberland Road, Dublin 4
Tel: 01 231 0520
An international programme that gives practical advice to men and women dealing with the side-effects of cancer treatment, like hair loss.

HEALTH INSURERS

Aviva Health
PO Box 764, Togher, Cork
CallSave: 1850 717 717
Email: info@avivahealth.ie
Website: www.avivahealth.ie

Quinn Healthcare
Mill Island, Fermoy, Co Cork
Tel: 021 202 2991
LoCall: 1890 700 890
Email: info@quinn-healthcare.com
Website: www.quinn-healthcare.com

VHI Healthcare
IDA Business Park, Purcellsinch, Dublin Road, Kilkenny
CallSave: 1850 44 44 44
Email: info@vhi.ie
Website: www.vhi.ie

FURTHER INFORMATION

For more information on hair loss, call the National Cancer Helpline Freefone
1800 200 700
(Monday–Thursday, 9am–7pm; Friday 9am–5pm) or email helpline@irishcancer.ie for confidential advice from our cancer nurse specialists.

Irish Cancer Society
43/45 Northumberland Road
Dublin 4
Tel: (01) 231 0500
Fax: (01) 231 0555
Email: helpline@irishcancer.ie
Website: www.cancer.ie

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