Preparing for Hair Loss from Cancer Treatment

Information for patients who are getting chemotherapy or radiation therapy

Read this information to learn:

- how to prepare for hair loss
- how wigs and headwear can help you cope
- how to choose the right wig or headwear for you
- where to find wigs and headwear
Losing your hair is a common side effect of chemotherapy and radiation therapy. But, it can be hard to cope with. It can affect how you feel about yourself.

**Remember:** Your hair loss is only temporary. It will eventually grow back. There are things you can do to help you prepare and cope with losing your hair.

### What can I do to prepare for my hair loss?

#### Cut your hair short

Short haircuts hide the look of thinning hair better than long haircuts. Short hair can also help you prepare and cope with losing your hair.

If you decide to cut your hair short:

- Think about cutting it very short. For example, you may want to cut it so it's only about 1/8 of an inch (about 1/3 of a centimeter) long.

- Use an electric razor with a guard to cut your hair this short. If you go to a salon for a haircut, ask them to use a guard too.

- Don’t shave your head. Your scalp may be sensitive from your cancer treatment. Shaving may also cause in-grown hairs and your skin to become irritated.

#### Think about getting a wig or headwear

Many people find it helpful to wear a wig or headwear (hat, scarf or sleeping cap) during their hair loss. Wigs and headwear can give you a new look while covering your head. They can also:

- protect your sensitive scalp from getting irritated and sunburned

- keep your head warm
What do I need to know about wigs?

- Wigs come in many different styles and colours. The cost for a wig will depend on what the wig is made of and its style.
- Wigs are made with human hair, false hair (synthetic), or high heat synthetic hair.
- Each type of wig has its own advantages and disadvantages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wigs made with:</th>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Human hair</td>
<td>• last longer</td>
<td>• need to be styled each time they’re washed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• can be restyled</td>
<td>• cost more than synthetic or high heat synthetic hair</td>
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<tr>
<td>Synthetic hair</td>
<td>• come already styled</td>
<td>• heat or hot steam can easily damage them</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• less styling needed after washing</td>
<td>For example, a blow dryer, curling iron or open barbecue or stove can damage them.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• cost less than wigs made with human hair only</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• easier to care for than human hair wigs</td>
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<tr>
<td>High heat synthetic hair</td>
<td>• come already styled</td>
<td>• can still be damaged by higher heat or hot steam, like a hot blow dryer, curling iron or open barbecue/stove</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• less styling needed after washing</td>
<td>• cost more than a synthetic wig</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• can use blow dryers, curling irons and other tools set at a <strong>low temperature</strong> (less than 180° C or 350° F)</td>
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How do I choose the right wig for me?

Make an appointment for a wig fitting at a wig store.
At this appointment, you can meet with a wig specialist who can:

- give you more information about the kinds of wigs available
- help you choose a style and colour that is right for you
- help you choose the right size

Choose a wig specialist you are comfortable with.
Your wig specialist will be your new hair designer. You will work closely with them to create your new look. So, it’s ok to try different wig stores until you feel comfortable.

Bring a photo to the wig fitting appointment.

- Bring a recent photo of you that you like. This will help the wig specialist find a wig closest to your own hair colour and style.
- If you want a new look, bring a photo of a hair colour and style you would like. This can help the wig specialist find the right wig for you.

Bring a family member or a friend to the appointment.
They can give you a second opinion and also provide support.

Tip: For health reasons, always wear a nylon stocking cap when trying on any wigs and headwear. Ask the wig specialist or sales person for one.

If you decide to buy a wig, ask your doctor for a “hair prosthesis” prescription and keep your wig receipt.

- Private health insurance and work health benefits may help pay for part or the full cost of your wig.
- Claim your wig as a health expense when filing your income tax to get money back for part of the cost.
What do I need to know about headwear?

Headwear is a head covering that you can wear for fashion, to protect your head, or for both reasons.

Headwear includes hats, scarves and sleeping caps. Hats and scarves are good choices if you don’t want to wear a wig during the day.

Hats and scarves come in many different styles, colours and patterns. Pick colours and styles that suit your face shape and personality. The cost of headwear depends on the material and style.

You wear sleeping caps to keep your head warm when you are sleeping. They also protect your scalp from rubbing against the pillow, which can irritate your sensitive skin.

How do I choose the right headwear?

Choose a hat that:
- covers your whole head
- is snug but comfortable. This will keep the hat from moving and rubbing against your scalp.
- has a wide brim to protect your head from the sun’s rays

**Tip:** The wig specialist or sales person can help you choose a style that is right for you. For health reasons, ask them for a nylon stocking cap to wear when trying on any headwear.

Choose a scarf and/or a sleeping cap that is made with cotton, bamboo or linen. These natural materials are more comfortable. They also won’t slip off as easily as silk or polyester scarves.
Where can I get wigs and headwear?

**Princess Margaret Cancer Centre’s Wig Salon & Accessories Boutique**

Princess Margaret Cancer Center, 3rd Floor, Room 3 – 642
☎ Phone: 416 946 6596

Princess Margaret’s Wig Salon & Accessories Boutique:

- has a great selection of high quality wigs and latest fashion hats, scarves and sleeping caps
- provides wig and headwear advice from a wig specialist
- offers a 1-time free wig fitting (45 minute private meeting) with the wig specialist to help you choose your wig’s colour, style and shape
- is an inclusive and supportive environment

Patients, family members, friends, volunteers and staff are welcome to look around and shop. For health reasons, all wigs and headwear are **final sale.**
Princess Margaret’s Wig Salon also offers:

Information online

Read more about the Wig Salon by going to:

Website: www.theprincessmargaret.ca

1. Click on **Patients & Families** on the blue menu
2. Click on **Patient & Family Services**
3. Click **Wig Salon & Accessories Boutique** under the **Appearance** heading

At this site, you can learn more about:

• caring for your wig
• tips for choosing a wig
• support to help you pay for wigs
• how family and friends can donate hair
• donating used wigs

Free workshops for women with cancer going through treatment

**The Wig Salon’s Scarf Tying Workshop**

Learn different ways to tie and wear scarves with confidence.

**When:** Every 2\textsuperscript{nd} and 4\textsuperscript{th} Tuesday of each month  
**Where:** Wig Salon, Princess Margaret Cancer Centre  
**To register:** call 416 946 6596

**Look Good Feel Better Program**

Learn to manage changes to your looks caused by cancer treatment, such as changes to your skin, loss of eyebrows, eye lashes and hair. This program has workshops for:

• **Young adults (18 to 30 years old)**  
  **When:** First Wednesday of each month  
  **Where:** Wig Salon, Princess Margaret Cancer Centre  
  **To register:** call 416 946 2075
• **All ages (during the day)**
  **When:** Every 2\textsuperscript{nd}, 3\textsuperscript{rd} and 4\textsuperscript{th} Wednesday morning of each month, and every 1\textsuperscript{st}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} and 3\textsuperscript{rd} Thursday afternoon of each month
  **Where:** Wig Salon, Princess Margaret Cancer Centre
  **To register:** call (416) 946 2075

• **All ages (in the evening)**
  **When:** 4\textsuperscript{th} Tuesday of every month
  **Where:** Princess Margaret Cancer Centre Lodge, 1\textsuperscript{st} Floor, 545 Jarvis St, Toronto, Ontario, M4Y 2H8
  **To register:** call (416) 413 7402

Pick up the Princess Margaret’s Wig Salon event calendar or the Patient & Survivorship Education Calendar of Events at the Patient & Family Library (main floor of Princess Margaret) for dates and times.

You can also find this information by visiting: [www.theprincessmargaret.ca](http://www.theprincessmargaret.ca)
The Patient Assistance Fund
You can get help paying for a wig at the Princess Margaret Wig Salon from the Patient Assistance Fund of Princess Margaret Cancer Centre.

To get help from this fund, you must be:
- a patient at Princess Margaret or University Health Network (UHN)
- in financial need (no health benefits)

Gently used wigs are available for free at the Princess Margaret Cancer Centre Lodge (see below).

For more information about the Patient Assistance Fund, please contact the Wig Salon at:
☎ Phone: 416 946 6596 or ✉ wig.salon@uhn.ca

The Princess Margaret Cancer Centre Lodge Program
545 Jarvis St, Toronto, Ontario, M4Y 2H8
☎ Phone: 416 413 7412

The Princess Margaret Cancer Centre Lodge Program is run by volunteers and offers a wide range of gently used and recycled wigs free for patients who:
- can't afford to buy a wig
- don't have private insurance coverage

All wigs have been sanitized, washed and re-styled. Wig fittings are offered on:
- Tuesdays, 5:30 pm to 7:30 pm
- Wednesdays, 10:30 am to 12:30 pm

You must call to make an appointment for a fitting.

Wigs and headwear stores in the community
There are stores in your community where you can also buy wigs and headwear. But, the staff may not know about the special needs of people with cancer. Ask lots of questions before you buy a wig or any headwear.
Use the Canadian Cancer Society’s Community Services Locator to find a store closest to you.

1. Visit www.cancer.ca/CSL
2. Click the Quick Search tab
3. Type your postal code
4. Type wigs and headwear in the search box and click Search

For more help, contact the Canadian Cancer Society’s Cancer Information Service:
☎ Phone: 1 888 939 3333 (call is free anywhere in Canada)
✉️ Email: info@cis.cancer.ca

The University Health Network (UHN) does not advertise or support any of the stores, goods or services listed. This list is for your information only.