Preparing for Hair Loss from Cancer Treatment

For patients having 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 centimetre) 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.

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<tr>
<th>Wigs made with human hair</th>
<th>Advantages:</th>
<th>Disadvantages:</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✓ lasts longer</td>
<td>✓ needs to be styled each time they’re washed</td>
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<td></td>
<td>✓ can be restyled</td>
<td>✓ costs more than synthetic or high heat synthetic hair</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wigs made with synthetic hair</th>
<th>Advantages:</th>
<th>Disadvantages:</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✓ comes 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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<td></td>
<td>✓ costs less than wigs made with human hair only</td>
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<td>✓ easier to care for than human hair wigs</td>
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**Advantages:**
- comes already styled
- less styling needed after washing
- can use blow dryers, curling irons and other tools set at a **low temperature** (less than 180 °C or 350 °F)
- costs less than wigs made with human hair only
- easier to care for than human hair wigs
- can still be damaged by higher heat or hot steam, like a hot blow dryer, curling iron or open barbeque/stove
- costs more than a synthetic wig

**Disadvantages:**
- can still be damaged by higher heat or hot steam, like a hot blow dryer, curling iron or open barbeque/stove
- costs more than a synthetic wig

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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 color 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, colors and patterns. Pick colors 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 color, 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 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
- donating used wigs
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)

For more information about the Patient Assistance Fund, please contact a social worker from Psyshosocial at 416 946 4525.

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

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