



CANCER RESOURCE CENTER

OF THE FINGER LAKES

Personal Issues Related to Breast Cancer Treatment



*Self portrait by Sheryl Sinkow Photography (www.sinkowphotography.com)
from "Facing Breast Cancer in our Community," 2002*

A cancer diagnosis can be a very difficult time for individuals and their families. The Cancer Resource Center of the Finger Lakes offers information and support because “no one should face cancer alone.”

This guide provides information related to breast cancer treatment, including resources for coping with side effects of chemotherapy and physical changes after surgery.

All of our services are offered free of charge. Visit crcfl.net or call 607-277-0960 to find out more.



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Hair Loss with Chemotherapy

Chemotherapy Effects

Most people think that chemotherapy drugs always cause hair loss, but depending on the drugs used there could be no hair loss, only slight thinning, or complete hair loss. It is common for hair loss to include all head and body hair including eyelashes, eyebrows, and even pubic hair. Hair loss occurs because chemotherapy targets all rapidly dividing cells—healthy cells as well as cancer cells. When chemotherapy drugs damage hair follicles it causes hair to fall out. It can be hard to predict which patients will lose their hair and which won't, even when they take the same drugs.

Managing Hair Loss Due to Chemotherapy

Management of hair loss focuses on your own comfort or discomfort with baldness and your physical comfort. If your hair becomes very thin or is completely gone during treatment, be sure to protect the skin on your scalp from heat, cold, and the sun. Use a broad-spectrum sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 30 and a hat. In cold weather, wear a hat or scarf to cover and stay warm.

Hair loss is usually gradual rather than sudden. If your hair is going to fall out, it usually begins within 2 to 4 weeks after treatment starts. Your hair will grow back once your chemotherapy treatment has finished. In very rare cases the hair does not grow back. This only happens with very high doses of particular drugs. You can ask your doctor or specialist nurse whether your drugs are likely to cause hair loss.

After chemotherapy ends, it may take several months for your hair to grow back, usually growing back at the same rate as before

chemotherapy. The first hair that grows in will likely be softer, may be a different color, and may be curlier than before. As your hair grows out it will change again. New hair growth is fragile and vulnerable, don't color or use heat on your new head of hair. Hair growth takes time, it also takes time to repair the damage caused by your cancer treatment.

Losing your hair during cancer treatment is a common and unsettling experience. Cancer Resource Center is here to help make it feel a little less distressing! CRC offers all items in our Boutique FREE OF CHARGE. Please email info@crcfl.net, or call our office at 607-277-0960 to arrange free pick up wigs, hats, or turbans. The following are options to consider:

Cooling Cap

You may want to consider the use of a "cooling cap" to reduce the risk of hair loss. More research is being done to understand how effective and safe cooling caps may be. There are some side effects of cooling caps to consider, such as headaches, scalp pain, and neck and shoulder discomfort. Talk to your health care team about the benefits, limitations, and side effects of cooling caps. If a cooling cap is appropriate for your situation, it can be ordered through your oncologist's office.

Wigs

We have a large inventory of new and gently used wigs available. Any donated wig is washed and styled before it is added to our boutique inventory. They vary from long to short, straight to curly to wavy, and deep to light shades of "standard" hair colors. Wigs are available in our Boutique at CRC and at our mini Boutiques located near the chemotherapy suites at Cayuga Medical Center – main and East campuses.

Tips on Getting Ready for a Wig

Many women have found that it is best to cut their hair short before they start chemotherapy. Benefits of a short haircut:

- It's less traumatic to lose short clumps of hair than long ones.
- It's easier to fit a wig over less hair.
- If your hair is already short you'll have an easier time adjusting to a short hair style in a wig, which is easier to care for than a long hair style.
- If you get used to short hair, you won't have to wait as long for your hair to grow back to feel like yourself.
- Shorter is also cooler—an important consideration because wigs can feel hot in the summer.



Wig Choices

Try to pick out a wig before your chemotherapy begins. You'll have more energy and the stylist will be able to see your natural hair color and style. You can get used to wearing the wig in trial sessions, alternating with your own hair.

Wigs come in all styles and colors. A wig made of real hair could cost between \$800 and \$3,000 or more, and requires more care than you give your own hair. Most women choose synthetic wigs. They look and feel good, and need very little attention and care. The cost is much less (\$30 to \$500). The wig needs to be comfortable, not lined with material that's going to feel scratchy against your scalp (remember that most wigs are designed for women who have some hair). Caps can be worn under the wig to protect the scalp.

Color is probably the most important quality in choosing a wig. Select a somewhat lighter color than your own hair, for two reasons:

- Your skin color may be off during chemotherapy. Less contrast is generally more flattering, and won't call attention to your complexion.
- Wig hair is usually thicker than your own hair. So while the shade may be the same as your hair color, the wig will appear darker.

Wigs are formed on an open-weave mesh that allows for ventilation. They are fitted with adjustable tapes along the temple, and have elastic and Velcro around the ears. They wash easily (every two weeks is recommended) and they can be "set" with sprays or gels.

How to Care for Your Wig

1. Gently brush the wig or hairpiece to remove teasing or tangles.
2. Add one teaspoon of shampoo to two quarts of cold (never hot) water. You can use special wig shampoo or regular shampoo.
3. Soak 3-5 minutes, then gently swish up and down. Do not rub.
4. Rinse thoroughly in cold water.
5. Pat out excess water with a soft towel. Do not squeeze or twist. Do not brush or comb until completely dry.
6. Allow the wig or hairpiece to dry at room temperature by draping it over a slender canister to allow air circulation. Never put a wig on a solid head stand or block, as that will stretch the cap.
7. When the wig is completely dry, it is ready to brush or comb. No setting is necessary because its preset body will bounce back to its original shape.
8. Do not use a hair dryer, a blow dryer, or a curling iron. Avoid excess heat. Sudden bursts of heat-such as opening an oven door-can damage your wig.

Wig Supplies

You can wash a wig with either wig shampoo or regular shampoo. Beauty Supply stores usually have shampoo and special nets. Give CRC a call if you need assistance in finding supplies.

Turbans, Hats, and Scarves

Turbans and hats are a lovely alternative to wigs, which some women find hot and uncomfortable to wear. An advantage of the boutique at the Cancer Resource Center is that people may make a free selection of all kinds of headwear to take home and try out. The types, colors, and styles of turbans, hats, and scarves are limited only by what is available at any given time at the center. Most have been made and donated by generous women in the area. Once you have found items that meet your needs, you may choose to buy similar ones online. Turbans, hats, and scarves are available online through several catalogs.



Other Resources:

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/tests-procedures/chemotherapy/in-depth/hair-loss/art-20046920>

https://www.breastcancer.org/tips/hair_skin_nails/hair_loss

<https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/cancer-in-general/treatment/cancer-drugs/side-effects/hair-loss-and-thinning>

Breastcancer.org

Adaptive Wear

Cancer treatment may result in body changes. Depending on a tumor's size and location, it can be removed and heal to near invisibility, or can significantly change someone's outward physical appearance. When these surgeries (and sometimes radiation) do cause a significant change to someone's body, a prosthetic device can be used. The CRC Boutique has a selection of mastectomy bras, breast prosthesis, and other personal care items available.

Words to Know:

Prosthesis (noun): an artificial device that replaces a missing or injured part of the body

Protheses (plural noun): more than one prosthesis

Prosthetic (adj.): of, relating to, or being a prosthesis

Prosthetics (noun, plural, but singular or plural in construction): the surgical or dental specialty concerned with the design, construction, and fitting of prostheses

Post-Surgical Camisoles

For some weeks after a mastectomy or lumpectomy, women are unable to wear regular bras or to lift the affected arm/s overhead. In addition to these limitations, tubes are often placed into the incision to drain fluid that can accumulate in the space where the tumor was. This fluid drains into small bags that may need to be worn for up to 2-3 weeks after surgery. During this period, women can wear camisoles that open in the front, and often both.

Lymphedema Sleeves

Lymphedema is a condition of localized fluid retention and tissue swelling caused by a compromised lymphatic system, which normally returns interstitial fluid to the bloodstream. When lymph nodes are removed or damaged from treatment, lymphedema can occur. Though incurable and progressive, treatment can relieve symptoms. Tissues with lymphedema are at high risk of infection & damage. Lymphedema can occur in any area of the body, but is most commonly seen by our clients in the arm, on the side affected by mastectomy or lumpectomy.

A common treatment for lymphedema is compression of the tissues to prevent swelling in the first place. One way to achieve this is by wearing compression garments and these need to be fitted very precisely. While CRC does not provide sleeves, we can provide guidance and information.

Other Resources:

<https://lymphaticnetwork.org/living-with-lymphedema/lymphedema>

What is a breast prosthesis?

Some women choose to have a saline or silicone breast implant after a mastectomy. Other women may choose to wear a breast prosthesis inside a special prosthetic bra after healing time.

Most insurance companies pay for the purchase of these items. However, it can take time to get approval and figuring out size/fit in a supportive, comfortable environment is something many of our clients appreciate about our boutique.

Prostheses are artificial parts that replace a missing part of the body. A prosthesis is designed to improve someone's quality of life by restoring a function or their appearance, and often both.

A breast prosthesis is an alternative for those who want to avoid reconstructive surgery, but wish to maintain the appearance of breasts. Most breast prostheses are made from soft silicone gel encased in a thin film. They're molded to resemble the natural shape of a woman's breast, or part of a breast. The outer surface feels soft and smooth, and may include a nipple outline.

Some prostheses are made of foam which is placed directly on top of your skin or in the pocket of a special bra. Prostheses come in many different styles, shapes, weights, skin tones and materials and with a range of accessories.

A member of your healthcare team or CRC staff can suggest places where you can buy prostheses. Many basic prostheses are available through the public health system. Most health insurance plans cover the costs of breast prostheses and special bras. CRC boutique offers limited prostheses. Some medical suppliers also carry them.

Preparing for a professional fitting for a prosthesis

It is important to take a well-fitting bra to your breast prosthesis fitting appointment so the fitter can see how the prosthesis will sit in your bra.

It's useful to wear a plain, light-colored top. This makes it easier to choose a prosthesis that gives you a good shape. It might be useful to think about the clothing and swimwear you plan to wear your prosthesis wear before your appointment. You could also take a variety of tops with different necklines so you can see how it might work with different styles.

Your prosthesis should feel comfortable, give you a good shape and be a reasonable match to your skin color.

Taking care of your breast prosthesis

The prosthesis fitter will provide information on how to care for your prosthesis. A prosthesis should last several years if you follow the recommended guidelines:

- Wash your prosthesis daily in warm soapy water and dry it with a towel. When you aren't using your prosthesis, store it in the shaped unit inside the box it came in.
- Take care not to catch the prosthesis with sharp objects such as rings or brooches as these may damage it, causing the silicone to leak.

If it is damaged due to a manufacturing fault, you should be reassessed and given a free new one. If it's damaged because you have punctured it or not followed the care instructions, you may be charged for replacing it.

Other Resources:

<https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/prostheses>

<https://breastcancernow.org/>

Skin issues associated with treatment

Radiation Therapy

The short-term side effects of external beam radiation therapy to the breast can include swelling in the breast and/or skin changes. Radiation can cause the skin to become dry and peel, itch, and turn darker and red. The skin can look sunburned or become swollen or puffy. Sores can develop and become painful, wet, and

even infected. The skin becomes more sensitive and you could sunburn easily. During treatment, consider using moisturising creams to keep your skin supple and protected. Avoid skin products that list alcohol or fragrance as an ingredient. Always use sunscreen and sun-protective lip balm.

Childbearing women who have had breast radiation may have problems breastfeeding. It could also cause the breast to become smaller and firmer and may affect your options for breast reconstruction later on.

In some cases, radiation could damage some of the nerves to the arm. This is called brachial plexopathy and can lead to numbness, pain, and weakness in the shoulder, arm, and hand. Radiation to the underarm lymph nodes might cause lymphedema, a type of pain and swelling in the arm or chest. For more information about lymphedema, ask us for CRC's Lymphedema Resource Packet.

Chemotherapy and Immunotherapy

Short-term side effects of the drugs used to treat cancer may have some of these effects on the skin and nails:

- Acne, bed sores, blisters, burning or skin pain, dry skin, hand-foot syndrome, itchy skin, peeling, flakey or crusty skin, photosensitivity (sunburns), rash, red or darkened skin, sores that can be painful and swollen skin.
- Cracked nails, cuticles that are swollen/painful, nail infections and yellow nails

Dental issues associated with treatment

Dental and oral side effects from chemotherapy may go away soon after treatment ends. They include:

- Dry mouth
- Thickened saliva
- Changes in taste
- Mouth sores
- Tooth decay
- Difficulty swallowing
- Difficulty chewing or opening the mouth
- Infection
- Bone disease
- Inflammation or pain in the lining of the mouth and tongue
- Bleeding gums
- Higher risk of tooth decay and or gum disease

To reduce your risk of dental issues, try these tips:

- Treat decayed, broken, or infected teeth and any other dental infection
- Make sure dentures fit well and are not irritating your mouth
- Remove your braces so they do not irritate your cheeks or tongue
- Gently brush your teeth 2 times a day and floss regularly
- Avoid alcohol
- Avoid hard, sticky or spicy foods in your diet

Glossary of Terms

Dysgeusia: metallic, salty, foul or rancid taste sensations

Xerostomia: dryness of the mouth or thickened saliva

Stomatitis: mouth sores and ulcers

Oral mucositis: inflammation and ulcers of gums, tongue and mouth tissues

Dysphagia: difficulty or discomfort swallowing

Dental caries: cavities

Peripheral painful traumatic trigeminal neuropathy: a phantom toothache

Infections of the mouth and throat

Trismus: also known as lockjaw

Candida infection: oral thrush or yeast infection

Osteonecrosis of the jaw: jaw bone cell death and breakdown

Other Resources:

<https://www.unitedconcordia.com/dental-insurance/dental-health/conditions/breast-cancer/breast-cancer-oral-health/>

<https://www.cancer.net/coping-with-cancer/physical-emotional-and-social-effects-cancer/managing-physical-side-effects/dental-and-oral-health>

<https://www.cancer.org/>



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