If hair loss is going to happen, it most often starts to fall out within 2 weeks of starting treatment and gets worse 1 to 2 months after starting therapy. But hair often starts to grow back even before treatment ends.

**What causes hair loss in people with cancer?**

Hair is constantly growing, with old hairs falling out and being replaced by new ones. Chemotherapy drugs often damage hair follicles, making hair fall out. Some chemo drugs can cause hair thinning or hair loss only on the scalp. Others can also cause the thinning or loss of pubic hair, arm and leg hair, eyebrows, or eyelashes. Radiation therapy to the head can also cause hair loss on the scalp.

**Things you can do to prepare for hair loss**

- Each person is different. Ask your doctor if hair loss is likely to happen. If it is, ask if it will happen quickly or gradually.
- Talk to your health care team about whether a cooling cap might help reduce your risk. 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, limits, and side effects of cooling caps.
- Wigs and other scalp coverings may be partially or fully covered by your health insurance. If so, ask your healthcare team for a wig prescription, which is typically written as a “cranial prosthesis.”
- You might choose to cut your hair very short or even shave your head before it starts falling out.
- Some people find wigs to be hot or itchy and use turbans or scarves instead. Cotton fabrics tend to stay on a smooth scalp better than nylon or polyester.
Other things you can do when you have hair loss:

- Your scalp may feel itchy or sensitive. Be gentle when brushing and washing your hair. Using a wide-toothed comb may help.
- Hair loss might be somewhat reduced by avoiding too much brushing or pulling (which can happen when making braids or ponytails, using rollers, blow drying, or using curling or flat irons).
- 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 sun. Use a broad-spectrum sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 30 and wear a hat. In cold weather, wear a hat or scarf to cover your head and stay warm.
- When new hair starts to grow, it may break easily at first. Avoid perms and dyes for the first few months. Keep hair short and easy to style.