

Wearing a wig to cope with hair loss

An Educational Resource for Patients With Triple-Negative Disease



Unfortunately, the most effective drugs against triple-negative breast cancer usually cause hair loss. Many women cope with this hair loss by wearing a wig. For these women, the wig helps them keep up their self image during treatment and carry on the normal activities of daily life without shouting to the world that they have cancer. If you plan to wear a wig, here are some tips to help you make a smart buy.

Where to look

If you can get on the Internet, consider looking there first. You'll be amazed at the different styles that are out there. Here are a few sites that have a lot of good information on wig selection and care to help you make the best choice:

- **Tledirect.org** (a nonprofit Web site and catalog of the American Cancer Society, offering hair-loss products and mastectomy products)
- **Headcovers.com** (started by a professional hair stylist and breast cancer survivor)
- **Paulayoung.com** (the least expensive and most popular online/catalog source of wigs for cancer patients)

Online shopping can save you time, but there's no substitute for holding a wig in your hands and trying it on with an expert at your side. A good wig salon will also teach you about proper wig care and will clean and restyle your wig for you.

A quick check of the local Yellow Pages or an Internet search should help you find wig suppliers in your

area. If you have trouble finding one, ask for help from your hairdresser, your hospital cancer center, members of your treatment team, a local breast cancer organization, or the American Cancer Society (1-800-ACS-2345).

If you decide to buy a wig online, be sure you fully understand their return policy. The best online sellers will allow you to return an unused wig for a full refund, but it must be in excellent condition.

Start looking before chemotherapy begins

Wig shopping while you still have your own hair makes it easier for a salesperson to match the wig to your current color and style. You should also take a photo of yourself while you still have your hair and cut and save a small swatch of hair from the top-front of your head in case you need it later for color matching.

Shorter is better

If your hair is long, consider cutting it short before you buy your wig and before you start chemotherapy. It's much easier to find a wig that fits over short hair. If your hair is short now, you'll have an easier time getting used to the way you look in a wig of similar length. Also, a short wig is cooler and can be easier to wear—you can just shake it out, put it on, and go. As an added bonus, it requires less care and maintenance.

Synthetics are cheaper and more practical

Wigs made of actual human hair can cost anywhere from a few hundred to several



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thousand dollars. Although human-hair wigs usually look great, they need more care. Modern synthetic wigs can also look very natural and are much less expensive—price range is roughly \$30 to \$500.

Your health insurance may cover the cost

Before you buy a wig, call your health insurance company. Most private plans cover some—if not all—of the cost. Medicare does not pay for wigs, but in that case, the cost of the wig may be tax deductible. You should ask your insurance company the following questions:

- Do they cover the some or all of the cost of a cranial prosthesis (k-ray-nee-ul prass-the-sis) required due to medical hair loss? (“Cranial prosthesis” is what most insurance companies call a wig that you need to buy for chemotherapy. Insurers tend to be real sticklers for proper terminology, so be sure to use whatever term they prefer.)
- **You will need to have your doctor write a pre-**



scription for your wig, using the exact terminology required by your insurance company!

- Does your insurer require that you purchase the wig from a seller of their choosing? Some do, some don't.
- Can you bill your insurer directly, or will you need to pay for the wig out of pocket and then submit the receipt for reimbursement?

Be sure to save a photocopy of your prescription, wig sales receipt, completed insurance forms, and any correspondence between you and the insurance company.

Mix it up

Wigs need to be washed, usually every couple of weeks, and may need to be restyled after washing. Since many flattering, good-quality wigs cost no more than \$40 or \$50, some women like to buy two or more so they'll always have one ready to go. The experts at breastcancer.org advise that you “Consider a completely fun wig that will boost your mood when you look in the mirror and tell the world you're doing fine. Try a new color, a new length, a new style.”

DO YOU HAVE QUESTIONS RELATED TO OTHER COMMON ASPECTS OF TRIPLE-NEGATIVE BREAST CANCER?

Additional **free** patient education fact sheets are available on the following topics:

- Chemotherapy side effects
- Myths/misconceptions about triple-negative disease
- Treatment options
- Diet and exercise during chemotherapy

Ask your doctor about these additional resources today!

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