Hair Loss (Alopecia)
Patient Education

Alopecia, (hair thinning or hair loss), can result from some cancer drugs. Cancer drugs kill cells that grow fast; cancer cells and healthy cells. Hair cells are fast growing and may be affected. Hair loss usually begins 14 to 21 days after drugs are begun. Hair on the head is often lost first. But hair over the entire body may also be lost. Alopecia is a temporary effect of the cancer drug. Hair may start to grow back during treatment and will normally grow back after the treatment is stopped. Regrowth is slow and it may be several months before it reaches a comfortable length. Your hair may grow back a different color and will frequently have a wave or curl to it.

The following are a few things that help assist you with your hair loss.

- Talk to your nurse or doctor about the chances of the drug causing hair loss.
- If you plan to wear a wig, think about visiting the wig supplier and wig stylist before you lose your hair. This will allow them to better match your hair color and style.
- Think about new head fashions, such as use of matching scarves and hats, turbans.
- Consider cutting your hair shorter before treatment begins. It may be emotionally easier to care for shorter strands of hair falling than longer ones.
- Keep your hair clean using a gentle shampoo, such as baby shampoo.
- Use a soft bristle brush to remove tangled hair.
- Do not bleach, tease, curl, or perm your hair. Avoid hair styling agents such as hair spray, gel, or mousse. All of these make the hair brittle and make the hair fall out faster.
- Ask your local American Cancer Society to see if “Look Good…Feel Better” meets in your area. This is a free service for personal appearance instructions for women facing changes because of cancer treatment.
- Talk to the nurse or doctor about your feelings and questions about how you look.

This document is intended for use by staff of Stanford Hospital and Clinics. No representations or warranties are made for outside use. Not for reproduction or publication without permission. Direct inquiries to Stanford Hospital and Clinics. 7/07;11/10.