
a series of fact sheets written
by experts in the field of liver
disease

HCV Treatment Side Effect Management: Hair Loss (Alopecia)

Alan Franciscus, Editor-in-Chief

Hair loss is a common occurrence even for healthy people. In fact, the average person will lose between 50 and 150 hairs every day. A person who has a healthy head of hair has over 100,000 hair follicles, so losing 50-150 hairs a day is generally not a problem. However, when people start to lose more hair than the body can grow then it can be a problem.

Hair loss can be caused by many different factors including heredity, medical conditions and harsh hair treatments. Interferon treatment can cause hair loss (alopecia) and changes in hair texture that can occur all over the body – not just on the head. It is, however, rare for someone on HCV therapy to lose all of their body hair or to go bald. Generally, people will start to notice that their hair is thinning, becoming brittle and easily breaking off. Hair color may become dull and the texture of hair may also change during therapy – curly hair may become straight, and vice-versa.

Treatment-related hair loss and changes in texture can greatly affect body image; and a person's appearance directly affects the way they feel about themselves and how they interact with other people. If someone is having hair loss while on treatment and it is affecting them psychologically it is highly recommended that he or she seek out professional psychological support or help from a peer led support group.

The good news is that hair loss or change in hair texture is only temporary and the hair lost and damaged during treatment will usually grow back after treatment. Some people even report that their hair grows back fuller and thicker than before treatment.

It is important to know that minoxidil (Rogaine) will not work to repair the damage of interferon induced hair loss. In fact, minoxidil should be avoided because it can irritate and dry out the scalp.

There are many steps that people can take to help reduce the chance of hair loss and other hair problems:

- Do not wash hair too frequently
- Every once in a while skip the shampoo and just use water – this will help to retain some of the natural oil in your hair
- Apply hair conditioner often
- Try gently massaging your scalp (use vegetable oil) in a circular motion. Better yet, have a friend or loved one massage your head, neck and shoulders
- Avoid using chemicals found in dyes and permanents – use natural products when possible
- A short layered haircut will make hair look thicker and fuller
- Use a Nioxin shampoo to help dry and damaged hair

- Try to avoid using a hair dryer, rollers and curling irons. If a hair dryer is needed, use the lowest setting possible. If using a towel to dry hair, do not rub too hard
- Style hair only when it is dry or damp
- Use a soft bristle brush or a wide tooth comb – avoid frequent brushing or combing
- Use a sunscreen, hat, or scarf to protect the scalp and hair from sun damage
- Do not tease hair
- Avoid hair styles that could strain hair, such as hair weaves or braiding
- Use a satin pillow to sleep on

Remember that the change in texture and loss of hair from HCV treatment is temporary and that it will resolve after stopping treatment.



Be Sure to Check Out the Other Factsheets in This Series: “HCV Treatment – Side Effect Management”

- A Guide to Hepatitis C: Treatment Side Effect Management
- Managing Side Effects of HCV Treatment
- Side Effect Management: Anxiety, Mania, and Depression
- Side Effect Management: Dental Hygiene
- Side Effect Management: Depression
- Side Effect Management: Depression – For Family and Friends
- Side Effect Management: Diarrhea
- Side Effect Management: Hair Loss
- Side Effect Management: Headaches
- Side Effect Management: Hemolytic Anemia
- Side Effect Management: Injection Site Reactions
- Side Effect Management: Maintaining a Positive Attitude
- Side Effect Management: Mouth Sores
- Side Effect Management: Nausea
- Side Effect Management: Neutropenia
- Side Effect Management: Rashes
- Side Effect Management: Taste Changes
- Side Effect Management: Water
- Side Effect Management: Weight Loss

For more information about hepatitis C, hepatitis B and HCV coinfections, please visit www.hcvadvocate.org.

• *hcspFACTsheet* •

A publication of the Hepatitis C Support Project

Executive Director

Editor-in-Chief, HCSP Publications
Alan Franciscus

Design

Paula Fener

Production

C.D. Mazoff, PhD

Contact information:

Hepatitis C Support Project
PO Box 427037
San Francisco, CA 94142-7037

alanfranciscus@hcvadvocate.org

The information in this fact sheet is designed to help you understand and manage HCV and is not intended as medical advice. All persons with HCV should consult a medical practitioner for diagnosis and treatment of HCV.

This information is provided by the Hepatitis C Support Project • a nonprofit organization for HCV education, support and advocacy • © 2008 Hepatitis C Support Project • Reprint permission is granted and encouraged with credit to the Hepatitis C Support Project.

