

# head

Our guide to hair and skin care during chemotherapy

**T**hink of chemotherapy and you instantly picture bald heads and sallow skin, both publicly proclaiming the fact that you have cancer. Yet it's important for your self-esteem to look good during your treatment: if we look good, we feel better. So how can you take the best care of your skin and hair, how do you choose the right wig, and what make-up tips will help on those days when you feel tired and washed out?

# girl

It's no use telling a woman whose hair is falling out that this is just temporary and all for the best in the long run. Hair is the outfit we never take off – even though we might not always feel it's our 'crowning glory', most of us would agree that our hair style, colour and length reflects who we are and the way we want to be seen. So it's tough to find your hair falling out, and to realise that even if it grows back quickly you will have to accept that after the baldness will come a period when it will be very short indeed. Many of the women we've interviewed over the years have told us that they dreaded losing their hair far more than losing a breast. But there are steps you can take to minimise the impact of hair loss, and some women get through chemo with their hair relatively unaffected.

Wigs are a somewhat sensitive subject, too. For some they represent the chance to have fun with new hairstyles, lengths and colours – a bit like raiding the dressing-up cupboard. But others just can't take them seriously, dreading the 'dead cat' look, or remembering how they cringed when their mothers tuned in to the wig vibe in the 70s (so embarrassing!). But wigs have come a long way since Jason King camped it up on our TV screens. And with a little know-how you'll be amazed at what the right wig can do for your looks and your self-confidence.

Make-up can be another minefield. If you're suffering from sweats the last thing you want is foundation streaking down your face. And while you'd like to get some definition back into your features, you're petrified of ending up with heavily-pencilled caterpillars where your eyebrows used to be. Yet unless you're a committed 'no make-up' woman, now is not the time to abandon cosmetics. Trust us – a lighter touch can work wonders, and knowing the colours that really make your looks 'pop' is a great place to start.

## Cruel to be kind

For most women who have breast cancer, chemotherapy is part of their treatment. Chemotherapy kills cancer cells by interfering with their ability to divide and reproduce themselves. The affected cells become damaged and eventually die. As the drugs are carried in the blood, they can reach cancer cells all over the body. One of the side effects is that chemotherapy also attacks healthy cells, and this affects your skin and hair. The good news is that, unlike cancer cells, healthy cells quickly regrow and any side effects are usually temporary.

Reducing the blood flow to the scalp during chemo sessions can help the hair follicles to stay healthy and thereby prevent or reduce hair loss. This is where the 'cool cap' can be very effective [for more information about the cool cap, see our article Chemical Assault in Amoena Life issue 17]. The cool cap is only successful if used with every course of chemotherapy, and it only works with certain types of drugs. However, women who have managed to keep most of their hair thanks to this method are usually very glad they persevered.

## wigs have come a long way since Jason King camped it up on our TV screens

### The right care

Whether you lose your hair or not, treatment can still make it dry and brittle. In its booklet *Coping with hair loss*, the charity CancerBACUP advises you to consider having your hair cut short before your treatment starts. This reduces the weight of hair pulling on the scalp, so it can be effective in reducing hair loss. Going straight from long, flowing locks to a pixie crop might be a bit of a shock, though, so if you have long hair you might want to have it cut in stages.

Now, more than ever, you need to take extra special care of your hair and scalp. That means treating yourself to some of the many mild and gentle shampoos and conditioners on the market – the more moisturising, the better. When you brush your hair, make sure you do it gently. If it's long, never brush or comb it from root to tip – always hold the hair and brush any tangles from the ends first, to protect the roots (this is an excellent tip for anyone, whether or not they're having chemotherapy). And now is the time to invest in a big, chunky, plastic, wide-toothed comb. At night, wearing a hairnet, soft cap or turban around your head will collect any loose hairs. And it goes without saying that it's not a good idea to perm your hair, as this can make it more dry and brittle.

Treat all heated styling aids with great caution – excessive heat from hairdryers, heated rollers, straighteners or curling tongs will over-dry your hair and make it break. Don't plait your hair or wear it in a tight band, as this can pull on your scalp as well as damaging and breaking hair. And avoid sleeping in curlers for the same reason.

To help your hair from the inside, stock up on fruit and vegetables, oily fish, nuts and pulses – all great skin and hair food. And you've heard it before – drink plenty of water, have alcohol in moderation, and try to build some relaxation into your life. You could also massage your scalp gently, to improve blood supply to the hair follicles.



Anyone who regularly colours their hair, particularly to cover grey, will be dreading their 'roots' showing through. Don't despair - you can still colour it, but make sure you only use tints or hair dyes made of natural colourants, such as henna or vegetable products. Your hairdresser should be able to advise you on the best products. A good alternative if you simply want to disguise roots or colour re-growth is a tinted styling mousse.

## Hair today...

On the other hand, radical though it may seem, you may prefer to shave your head completely, even before you start losing your hair. Many readers have told us that this gave them a sense of control over what was going to happen, and they felt it was preferable to waiting for their hair to fall out.

We asked TV presenter and style guru Patrick Swan, who works with breast cancer patients at the London Haven, for his thoughts. "You have to be very positive that even if your hair does come out, it is going to come back," he emphasises. "One cannot be told that often enough and you must reinforce it in your own mind."

Patrick advises facing up to hair loss, rather than trying to avoid the issue. "Get rid of your hair when you can't cope with how it is coming out. Don't do the not brushing, not washing, thinking it will last longer - that is just a fallacy."

## ... wig tomorrow?

If you do lose your hair, or shave it off, what are the options available to you? The Sinead O'Connor look isn't for everyone. These days there are many different styles and colours of wigs to choose from, and they're much more natural looking and comfortable to wear than in the past. In fact, many of the latest styles are incredibly realistic - some even incorporate dark roots for that 'regrowth' effect. And thankfully there's now also a good selection of wigs for black women (see contacts).

"I think wigs have their place," continues Patrick. "It is a great opportunity to have longer hair if you want it. The biggest mistake is to forget that you should use your fingers to style them as opposed to a brush or comb.

When wigs are shaken before they are put on and then worked with the fingers, it gives a more realistic look. If you have a fringe naturally then it will look right on your wig, but don't feel you have to have a fringe just to make your wig look more natural."

We asked Lynne Harris, sales and marketing director of Britain's leading wig specialist, Trendco, for some tips on choosing and wearing a wig. Trendco supplied the wigs that



If you have a good hairdresser, they could help you choose your wig and, if necessary, cut and restyle it for you.

look so fantastic on the models in our photo shoot for this feature, all of whom had lost their hair through chemo.

## Real or synthetic?

Probably the first concern that many people have is whether to buy a synthetic fibre wig or one made from human hair. Lynne points out that there are pros and cons for both types. While human hair wigs are more expensive, "they do look and feel more natural, allowing you to style them as you would your own hair," she says. "You can use straighteners, curling tongs and heated rollers on a human hair wig to create a different look.

"Human hair wigs will not frizz. They feel soft and natural to the touch, and they can be coloured. However, like your own hair, they can become porous and dry, and if coloured they might fade. A human hair wig definitely needs more maintenance than a synthetic one - it's really a matter of personal preference." And it's good news that this type of wig no longer needs to be dry cleaned, but can be washed and styled at home or by your stylist.

All synthetic wigs are made from a modacrylic fibre which is extremely easy to care for and always looks good. "These come in many styles, colours and prices to suit most individuals," continues Lynne. The style is heat-sealed into the hair so that they can be hand-washed with shampoo, left to drip-dry overnight and are then ready to wear. Hair spray can be used if necessary; however, avoid using too much as this makes the hair look dull and unnatural.

Any salon or wig specialist will give you advice on after care, or your wig fitter will show you, and you should always receive an after care leaflet with your purchase. "Some salons will include the cost of styling in their initial prices," says Lynne. "Here at Trendco, if a wig needs a fringe trimming or the wig thinning out a little we do not charge for this. It is usually done at the time of the consultation."

## Choosing your wig

Lynne advises that if you don't want the wig to change your appearance, it's a good idea to choose the same volume of hair as you had before. "Too much hair can make it look more as though you are wearing a wig," she says. "If in doubt, choose a wig with slightly less hair than you had before. Remember that the wig can be cut and styled to suit your needs by your hairdresser or the wig consultant."



*Eileen Evans, 39 was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2004. Wig: Rosie in Chestnut (Er84), Amore collection from Trendoo. Principles cardigan from JoJo Lewis.*

When it comes to colour, for a natural look choose your own colour or one shade lighter. "If the hair is darker than your natural colour it can look strange to your friends and draws attention to the change. Generally a change to a lighter colour will be less noticeable."

An alternative approach is to treat this as an opportunity to try a completely different style or colour, to have a little fun and to surprise your family, friends and colleagues. "Experimenting with cut, colour and shape has never been easier, thanks to the wide range of realistic-looking wigs available," says Lynne.

Here are some tips for making the most of your looks while being a bit adventurous!

## Face shape

Your hair should frame your face, and the cut or style should make the most of its shape. There are lots of tricks that can help your face look slimmer, fuller, shorter or broader. Talk to your hairdresser about what's best for you.

The "ideal" face shape is oval. Usually any style and any length suits this face shape, except perhaps heavy, straight fringes or centre partings that can make the forehead seem wider.

The round face needs a style with height and narrowness. Chin-length, wispy cuts that frame the face; chunky, layered styles that fall onto the face; layered fringes, and asymmetric long wispy styles across the face will all help to offset roundness and slim the face. Avoid round shapes (short bob); tight perms; solid fringes that create too much width at the cheeks; very short styles that accentuate roundness of face, or flat hair on top of the head.

Oblong faces need a style that will shorten them. A jaw-length style can work – but make sure it's not shorter than that or your face will seem even longer. Layered and asymmetric fringes work very well for long faces – think Liz Hurley and Helena Christensen. Layering the hair at the side of the face helps to give width, as does an off-centre parting. Avoid very long, straight styles and 'up-dos' with short backs and sides, as these will lengthen the face.

Straight styles with extra volume, curl or wave at the jawline suit triangular or heart-shaped faces. The aim is to widen the jaw and reduce the breadth of the forehead (an asymmetric fringe is good for that). Mid-length styles are best. Avoid full styles across the temples; high hair, which exposes a weak chin; hair pulled severely off the face, and heavy or very straight fringes that add width to the forehead.

Softening a square face requires texture, layering, wispy cuts or curl. Go for a style that frames the face; brush the hair forward to soften angles and create narrowness and softness. Avoid square cuts – e.g. a bob that finishes at jaw length; geometric shapes; deep cut, straight fringes and centre partings.

## To wig or not to wig?

Not everyone wants to wear a wig, especially daily, and the good news is that headwear is currently very popular. In summer you can choose from funky bandanas and baseball caps or beautiful headscarves, and if your chemo is in winter you'll find that headwear is an essential way to stay warm. Turbans are an excellent option for wearing around the home, and for going out you can choose from cute beanies, Chelsea caps for 60s cool, fedoras and floppy 70s hippy girl hats, or tap into fashion's Russian moment and pick a hat with faux-fur trim! Whatever you go for, it's good to know you can still keep up with current trends at the same time as keeping your head covered.



**Debbie Coulson, 45** was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2005. Wig: *Claire in Ginger Brown (£302), Noriko collection from Trendco. Phase Eight top and JWF skirt both from John Lewis.*

*Velvet headwrap in teal and turquoise (£15.99) from Luscious Lids.*

*Wig: Claire in Butterscotch (£102), Noriko collection from Trendco. Top, model's own.*



When choosing headwear, the best way to work the look is to try to make sure it coordinates with the rest of your outfit – that way it won't be so obvious, and you'll look a lot more "together". Another way to make headwear look more natural is to attach a fringe – Trendco has a great selection.

Sheila Wilson, owner of Luscious Lids, knows how important it is for women to have another option to wearing a wig. When her sister was going through chemo, Sheila – a skilled dressmaker – designed a range of headwear to help her to look good during her treatment. Sheila has now launched a successful business offering a wide range of headwraps, turbans and head bands by mail order. Because she makes all the products herself she can adapt them to suit individual requirements, and can also make headwear that will match a specific outfit as long as the material is suitable. (See contacts).

## Time for a rethink?

When your hair finally starts to grow back – hooray! – you can be faced with a range of other issues to grapple with, such as a scaly, itchy scalp, and how to make the 'skinhead'

## This is a great time to rethink your style or colour.

look work for you. It's best not to use medicated shampoos, as they can result in further irritation. Instead, keep it moisturised – you can even wash your hair and scalp with aqueous cream (available from your chemist).

As your hair becomes longer, move onto a very mild shampoo that's designed for frequent use, and don't forget conditioner.

You may be desperate to start tinting and perming again, and this is OK if your hair and scalp are in good condition. However, if your hair is breaking or not growing normally, is unusually dry or rough to the touch, or if your scalp is scaly, sore or irritated, you need to wait before dashing to your colourist or raiding the chemist's shelves. If you do decide to colour your hair, it's best to do a patch test on a small, hidden area to assess the outcome before treating the whole head.

Many women report a change in the colour or texture of their hair when it grows back. Sometimes women whose hair used to be straight are faced with springy curls, which is the result of the chemotherapy drugs distorting the hair follicle. Patrick Swan is positive about curls: "You get the perm you always dreamt of! Having curly hair gives

you more options as you become more mature. A mature woman needs fullness around her face. It makes you look younger. And it's never been easier to straighten your hair with irons or chemical treatments, if you do want to get back to straight hair."

This is a great time to re-think your style or colour. "It is the forced Triinny and Susannah 'dreaded moment' when you are discovered trying to look the way you looked 15 years ago," continues Patrick. "I always say it is a chance to take a realistic look at yourself and it stops you staying stuck in the look you first scored in!"

So how will you know when to stop wearing your hat or wig? When can you rush to the hairdresser for the first cut? What's the best way to reintroduce colour? Patrick says you need patience at first – you've got to just let the hair grow. "Don't feel you need to have a shape put into it immediately. The first quarter to half inch of hair might have a slightly burnt feeling or look, and you really want to let it grow to about two to three inches before getting it cut. Choose a style that brings the hair onto your face, and as soon as you can part it somewhere other than in the centre it will have a stylish and modern appearance. Don't be afraid to play around and experiment."

When it comes to colour, Patrick's advice to women who have been colouring their hair dark for many years is to rethink, because dark hair can make you look older. "Go to your hairdresser or colourist, because that is what a professional is for, and go to the best you can afford. If your scalp is still sensitive, a mixture of highlights and lowlights will allow you to have the colour without the chemicals touching the scalp."



## Looking after your skin

Many women's skin becomes very dry during chemotherapy. Again, gentle products are best, and plenty of moisturiser – your favourite cream, applied more frequently, or treat yourself to something special. "There is nothing wrong with a very basic and inexpensive cream like aqueous cream, paraffin liquid or E45," says Patrick. Avoid sun damage, too; use a high SPF cream every day – even in winter. If you are in doubt about any of the ingredients used in cosmetics or skincare, the Campaign for Safe Cosmetics' website ([www.safecosmetics.org](http://www.safecosmetics.org)) lists the manufacturers which have pledged to eliminate toxic or damaging substances from their products.

We've heard it before, but it's true – we should all drink more water. Patrick believes that drinking plenty of water and juice really does help plump up the skin, but don't guzzle it all down in one go. "You can't just down a litre of water, that will just flush you through. Sip it steadily throughout the day."



Jane Berryman, 49 was diagnosed in 2004. Wig: Laurie in Spring Honey (£192), Amore collection from Trendco. Top, model's own.

Velvet headwrap in chocolate brown and cream from Conscious Lits.

Wig: Michelle in Butterscotch (£85), Gallery collection ROP from Trendco. Country Casuals top from John Lewis.



## Let's make up

This is definitely not the time to abandon make-up. "It's an absolute must if you have very short hair," says Patrick. If you want to know the make-up that will work best for you now, read on!

Patrick is in no doubt about which is the most important item in your make-up bag. "Lipstick," he says. "It's the first thing a woman should have in her repertoire as she gets older. When it comes to lipsticks I always recommend that women wear a tinted lip gloss. Even if you have vertical lines around your mouth, if you pencil your mouth in and use a lip gloss in the centre of the mouth it will make your lips look fuller and you will look younger." Use a soft pencil in a tone that matches your natural lip colour – not a harsh brown or red – and aim to pencil along the outline of the mouth with light strokes, then blend the colour across the entire lip with a lip brush. Glosses are great fun. You can choose from clear or something with pearlised pigment, or a coloured gloss that compliments your skin tone. And gloss will bring light to the face, which is much less ageing than matt lips.

As to lipsticks, says Patrick, "nothing looks more ageing than a hard mouth! Modernise your lip colour." Are you still using the day-glo pink you used in the 80s? Or the pearly beige that worked when you left school? Make-up has come a long way, and so have you. "If you are nervous about making the change, always put your old favourite lip colour on first, then apply either a brighter or a softer one over it to make the transition from the old to the new easier."

So much for a precious pout. What other tips can Patrick share with us? "Another big problem that women have is that they tend to fade as they get older. Establishing an eyebrow will define the eye area and make you look younger. I always recommend using a powder if possible, as opposed to a pencil. Pencils contain grease, which can melt if you have hot flushes, and powder produces a more natural effect anyway." Practise with a matt shadow and a stiff, angled brush (slightly dampened) – and don't go too dark: even women with black brows should try a very deep, cool brown rather than jet black. Most make-up companies offer brow kits – those from Estee Lauder and Benefit are particularly good. Perfect brows should begin in line with the centre of your nostril, and arch up to their highest point directly above your iris. To find out how far your brow should extend, place a pencil in a diagonal line from the side of your nostril, taking it past the outer edge of your eye and up to the brow. The eyebrow should stop here. Ideally your brow should be slightly thicker

on the inside, arching gently and tapering towards the outside. When drawing in an eyebrow use light, feathery strokes, not a continuous hard line. And build up slowly – remember, less is more!

If you are skilled and have good eyesight then you could try false eyelashes but, says Patrick, "most women can't see that close. If you use mascara, only put it on your top lashes, as emphasising the lower lashes can drag your face down and cast shadows under your eyes."



To further emphasise your eyes, Patrick recommends trying a soft kohl pencil in brown or grey to line the inside rims of the eyelids – upper and lower. "This may look a bit startling at first, but when the eye fluid softens it the colour acts as a stain and provides a reference point which makes the lashes stand out a bit."

And right up there with lipstick is good old blusher. "It can perk everyone up. Cream blushers make more sense than powder – particularly if you are having hot flushes. They blend into the skin, while powder can cake if you get sweaty and sit on top of the face. If you are feeling pale and washed out, cream blush wins hands down over tinted moisturiser or foundation." And what if flushes are a real problem? "Flushes do play havoc with cosmetics," says Patrick. "You can't put anything on that is going to stay on. Just use tissues to blot, and apply some loose powder, with the finest tint of colour, with a puff. This will create the

look you would get with foundation." And be ready to reapply frequently – although not heavily.

Patrick is also a big fan of concealers. "I prefer them to foundation. As you mature, often the inside corners of your eyes recede and you can get shadows around there. If you dot a little light, yellow-based concealer (pink-based concealers can emphasise the bluey tint of shadows) on the inside corner next to the nose, and on the lower lash line nearest the nose, and use your middle finger to gently press it into the skin, this will pull the eye out and make you feel younger and more awake. Never put concealer around the outside of your eye if you have lines."

## Great accessories are a real investment for any woman

If you're not sure about make-up or are nervous about trying new looks, why not ask for expert help? Our real life models for this feature were made up by Sylvia McLean and Marilyn Ferguson from the charity Look Good ... Feel Better. Formed 11 years ago by the cosmetics industry to help women combat the visible side-effects of cancer treatment, the charity's aim is to greatly increase women's self-confidence at

a very difficult time in their lives. Trained volunteer beauticians hold beauty makeover workshops in 36 hospitals across the UK, where women are shown how to give themselves a beauty makeover, using the latest products donated by participating companies. The women are then given 17 full-sized products to take home. Contact Look Good...