

## How you look and feel

**Cancer can change you – your physical appearance, your emotions, and how you feel about yourself. And that can be difficult to deal with.**

### It's good to talk

Lots of young people feel insecure about how they look in general, so it seems really unfair that you now have to worry about losing your hair or putting on/losing weight as well.

Try to share your feelings with someone. It could be your parents or grandparents, or a brother or sister, or your friends. Or maybe you'll find it easier to talk to your CLIC Sargent Youth Worker or Social Worker, a nurse or someone in your psychological support team.

### Sharing your worries

*"I'm afraid I'll look horrible without my hair."*

The first thing to know is that not everybody does lose their hair. And even if you do, it will all grow back about three to six months after your chemotherapy.

If it's going to happen, it will start falling out within a few weeks of your first treatment. You'll see it on your pillow in the mornings, in your hairbrush or in the shower, and you may find you have an itchy scalp. You may also lose your eyebrows and eyelashes, as well as your body hair.

You might find it embarrassing to go out in public at first, but if people stare at you, be brave. It can also be fun choosing a wig, hat or scarf that suits you - it's a chance to invent a whole new look for yourself.

**Useful tip:** If you're going out in the sun, wear a high-factor sunscreen on your head as well as a hat – after all, your scalp's never been completely exposed to the sun before.

*"I used to love my food, but I just can't eat!"*

Your illness, your treatment or medication can make you feel pretty weird. You may feel like you want to throw

up or can't seem to keep anything down. A dry or sore mouth can make it hard to chew or swallow. Or your sense of taste may go bananas and even your favourite food may seem inedible! But to fight your cancer you need to maintain your levels of energy... so here are some tips:

### Feel sick?

- Avoid strong smells, get some fresh air if possible
- Try to eat little and often
- Avoid greasy food
- Avoid hot food - sometimes warm or cold food is better
- You could ask for anti-sickness medicines
- Eat and drink more slowly than usual
- Try peppermint or ginger tea, mint sweets or ginger biscuits

### Sore or dry mouth?

- Avoid salty or spicy foods
- Choose soft and smooth foods, like ice-cream and shepherd's pie
- Blend or sieve foods if things get really bad
- Ask about medicines that could help

### Tasteless food?

- Eat food with a strong taste, like marmite or spicy sausages
- Suck mints or fruit sweets to lose the bad taste
- Add extra herbs and spices to pep up the taste
- Eat a wide range of food, until you find you get it right!
- If you're taking drink supplements, put them in the freezer for a while before you take them – they taste better nearly frozen.

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*"I've got the opposite problem... I just want to eat all the time!"*

If your treatment involves steroids, you can feel very hungry and just want to eat all the time! You may be worried about putting on weight. But if you do, remember it is only a temporary thing and your appetite will get back to normal when steroid treatment stops.

In the meantime, do your best to eat a healthy range of food because you need to be as fit as you can to fight cancer.

- Talk to the dietician at your hospital and ask for some recommendations, including foods you should avoid.
- Try and take some exercise whenever you feel you have the energy, even if it's just a short walk round the shops.
- Ask the hospital physio for some exercises.
- Talk to your nurse, social worker or youth worker. They can tell you what's worked for other people.
- Visit some of the websites listed at the end of this factsheet, where you can exchange tips and ideas with other people of your age.

*"I'm afraid no one will ever fancy me again."*

If you're currently going out with someone, you may be worried that they'll stop finding you attractive, or that they're only sticking with you because they feel sorry for you. Well, the only way to find out the truth is to ask them. Tell them how you feel. You may not get the answer you were hoping for, but at least it will be the start of an open, honest relationship.

Remember, your cancer will put a strain on them as well, because they'll worry about you and what will happen. Warn them that you may have mood swings or feel depressed sometimes. Ask your CLIC Sargent Youth Worker or Social Worker for a leaflet to give them that explains about your cancer and what's going to happen in the future.

If you're not going out with someone right now, you may be worrying about telling a future partner that you've had cancer. How will they react? What if you've lost your confidence about chatting to someone you fancy?

There is never a 'right time' so just give it a try. The more you do it, the more you'll find what works for you. And if they're put off by the fact you've had cancer, they're probably not the right person for you.

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### Useful websites

#### For hats and headgear:

- [hats4heads.co.uk](http://hats4heads.co.uk)
- [headcovers.com](http://headcovers.com)
- [wigtopia.co.uk](http://wigtopia.co.uk)
- [teenslivingwithcancer.org/dealing/weird/mirror/hair.asp](http://teenslivingwithcancer.org/dealing/weird/mirror/hair.asp)
- [mayoclinic.com/health/hair-loss/CA00037](http://mayoclinic.com/health/hair-loss/CA00037)

#### For tips on keeping your weight under control:

- [click4tic.org.uk/dealwithit/bodyimage/weightchanges](http://click4tic.org.uk/dealwithit/bodyimage/weightchanges)
- [canceralternatives.mednet.ucla.edu/tipseat.html](http://canceralternatives.mednet.ucla.edu/tipseat.html)
- [cancer.gov/cancertopics/eatinghints](http://cancer.gov/cancertopics/eatinghints)
- [teenslivingwithcancer.org/dealing/healthy/nutrition.asp](http://teenslivingwithcancer.org/dealing/healthy/nutrition.asp)

#### To contact other people in a similar situation:

- [teenslivingwithcancer.org/dealing/stand/deal/default.asp](http://teenslivingwithcancer.org/dealing/stand/deal/default.asp)
- [plwc.org](http://plwc.org) (coping section)
- [teenagecancertrust.org](http://teenagecancertrust.org) (forum)