

The ROYAL MARSDEN
NHS Foundation Trust

Chemotherapy and scalp cooling

**Information for young people,
carers and their families**

Oak Centre for Children and Young People



NHS



**Teenage
and Young
Adults Team**

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This booklet is evidence based wherever the appropriate evidence is available, and represents an accumulation of expert opinion and professional interpretation.

Details of the references used in writing this booklet are available on request from:

The Royal Marsden Help Centre

Telephone: Chelsea 020 7811 8438 / 020 7808 2083
Sutton 020 8661 3759 / 3951

Email: patientcentre@rmh.nhs.uk

The Royal Marsden NHS Foundation Trust
Fulham Road
London SW3 6JJ

royalmarsden.nhs.uk

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Should you require information in an alternative format, please contact The Royal Marsden Help Centre.

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Thanks to supporters of The Royal Marsden Cancer Charity, we raised £16 million to build the Oak Centre for Children and Young People. Opened in September 2011 by TRH The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, it is one of the largest comprehensive children and young people's cancer centres in Europe.

The Royal Marsden Cancer Charity raises money solely to support The Royal Marsden, a world-leading cancer centre. We ensure our nurses, doctors and research teams can provide the very best care and develop life-saving treatments, which are used across the UK and around the world.

From funding state-of-the-art equipment and groundbreaking research, to creating the very best patient environments, we will never stop looking for ways to improve the lives of people affected by cancer.

The Royal Marsden Cancer Charity
For a future beyond cancer.

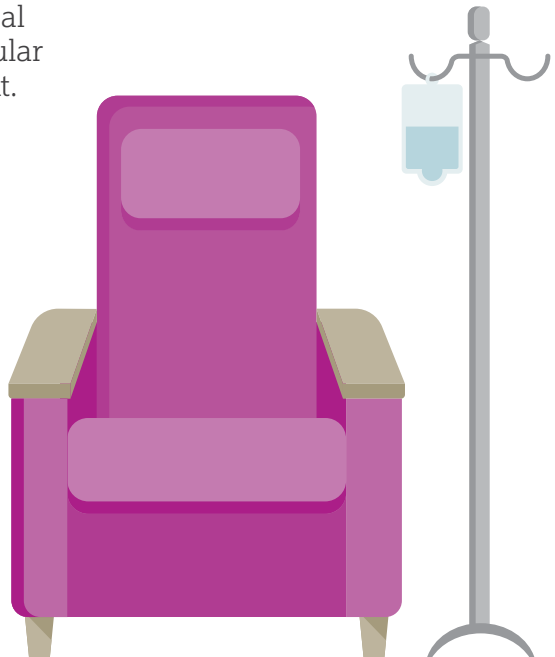


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Introduction

This leaflet provides information about scalp cooling but is not designed to replace the discussion you have with your clinical team. Scalp cooling is not beneficial for all types of chemotherapy. If a healthcare professional has recommended this leaflet for you, it is because scalp cooling may be beneficial in line with your particular chemotherapy treatment.



What is scalp cooling?

Scalp cooling is a way of reducing the amount of hair lost during your chemotherapy treatment. Remember not all types of chemotherapy will cause hair loss. We will discuss your chemotherapy with you and explain more about hair loss on an individual basis.

At the moment, scalp cooling is the only known method of reducing hair loss during chemotherapy treatment.

How does scalp cooling help?

Some chemotherapy drugs affect the hair follicles and cause your hair to fall out. Scalp cooling works by cooling your scalp so that the blood supply to the hair

follicles is reduced, slowing down the activity in these cells. These two effects together mean that less chemotherapy reaches the hair follicles. If less of the drugs reach these follicles, less hair will fall out.

Who can have scalp cooling?

There are lots of different types of chemotherapy drugs. Scalp cooling will only work for a few types of these. For scalp cooling to work, the chemotherapy drug(s) you are receiving must leave your body quickly. These drugs are said to have a 'short half-life'. The nurses in the chemotherapy unit will be able to tell you if scalp cooling could work for you.

What does scalp cooling involve?

Your scalp will be cooled below its normal temperature so it will feel cold and it may be a little uncomfortable. This is done using a cap which is attached to a cooling machine; this is put onto your head up to 30 minutes before the chemotherapy is given to you. It will stay

on whilst the drug(s) are being given and for some time after your treatment session has finished. The length of time the cap has to stay on after your treatment has finished will depend on the chemotherapy drug(s) being used. The time can range from 1–5 hours, but the average time is between 2–4 hours.



A nurse demonstrating a scalp cooling cap

What will scalp cooling feel like?

You will probably feel cold when having scalp cooling. Wearing warm clothes and having hot drinks will help you feel warmer.

You may get a headache during scalp cooling, especially in hot weather.

To start with, scalp cooling feels very cold and can be uncomfortable. This feeling does not last for long. After a few minutes the feeling reduces to being bearable and for most, manageable. Remember scalp cooling can be stopped at any time if you want it to.

Will scalp cooling work?

How well scalp cooling works for you will depend on things such as the thickness and length of your hair and the type of drug(s) you are having. Generally speaking, scalp cooling works well. However, most patients experience some thinning of their hair. A few patients experience significant hair loss; if this is a concern, your chemotherapy nurse can then refer you for a wig.

What are the risks of scalp cooling?

There is a very small risk of developing a secondary cancer deposit in the scalp. This is because the chemotherapy will work less effectively in the area being cooled. However, this is extremely rare. Scalp cooling will not affect the treatment to the cancer cells in the rest of your body unless you have a blood cancer. For this reason, we do not offer scalp cooling to haematology patients.

Please be aware that there may be occasions where the nurses suggest that you stop using the scalp cooling technique if it starts to affect other aspects of your treatment. For example, if we are using a peripheral cannula to give your treatment, it can be harder to insert a cannula if you are very cold from the scalp cooling as it constricts the veins. Nurses may also stop the scalp cooling if it makes you feel unwell.

What can I expect on the day I have scalp cooling?



Please bring in your own organic or pH neutral / balanced conditioner. This is applied to your wet hair and we can help you with this. The cooling cap comes in several sizes to ensure a good fit. The cooling cap is placed on your head and attached to the cooling machine for about 30 minutes before you are given the chemotherapy .

The machine cools your scalp down and then keeps an even temperature whilst you are receiving your chemotherapy.

For infection control reasons, please bring your own conditioner and a comb in with you on the day of your appointment for chemotherapy. You may use any organic or pH neutral / balanced conditioner, available from many chemists and supermarkets.

You may wish to bring some warm clothing and a blanket with you to help keep you warm during your treatment.



When the cooling cap is removed your hair may be damp and there will be some hair conditioner left on your hair. We suggest gently washing out the conditioner with tepid water the evening after treatment.

Treat your hair as gently as possible whilst you are receiving chemotherapy. Use a pH balanced shampoo

and conditioner, preferably an unperfumed one, and use minimal hair styling products. You should avoid heated hair appliances such as hair dryers, curling tongs and straighteners and should also avoid hair dye.

You may wish to bring a warm hat or a hair wrap to wear when you leave the department.

Useful resources

Macmillan Cancer

Support – written guide about scalp cooling

www.macmillan.org.uk/cancer-information-and-support/impacts-of-cancer/hair-loss/scalp-cooling

Paxman Scalp Cooling

– short video of what to expect

www.coldcap.com/?lang=gb

Little Princess Trust

– information on real hair wigs for teenagers and young adults

www.littleprincesses.org.uk





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