

Breast cancer and hair loss

breast
cancer
care



This information is by Breast Cancer Care.

We are the only specialist UK-wide charity that supports people affected by breast cancer. We've been supporting them, their family and friends and campaigning on their behalf since 1973.

Today, we continue to offer reliable information and personal support, over the phone and online, from nurses and people who've been there. We also offer local support across the UK.

From the moment you notice something isn't right, through to treatment and beyond, we're here to help you feel more in control.

For breast cancer care, support and information, call us free on **0808 800 6000** or visit **breastcancercare.org.uk**



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Introduction

Many people will lose either some or all of their hair as a result of treatment for breast cancer. For some, this is the most distressing side effect of treatment. You may feel that your hair is an important part of how you feel about yourself and losing it may affect your confidence and self-esteem. Some people find that being prepared for hair loss before it occurs helps them cope better when it happens.

This booklet explains how you may lose your hair and the effect it can have on you. It looks at how to care for your hair and scalp during and after treatment and the different headwear you may want to try, including wigs and headscarves. We've included step-by-step guides to tying headscarves and tips on recreating the illusion of eyebrows and eyelashes.

In the final part of the booklet we discuss what usually happens when your hair grows back and how to look after it.

Although this booklet mainly talks about women, men who have lost their hair while being treated for breast cancer will also find some of the information useful.

The experience of hair loss (alopecia), scalp and hair care and hair regrowth will be different for everyone. There are also differences according to European, Indian, African, Middle-Eastern and Asian hair types. Getting individual advice can be very helpful. This may be from your specialist nurse or one of the organisations listed at the back of this booklet.

How you may feel

For many of us, the way we feel about ourselves is closely linked to the way we look, and so losing your hair can be devastating. You may feel anxious at the thought of losing your hair, or angry and unhappy that this has happened in addition to your cancer diagnosis and treatment.

Some people feel guilty about being upset when they lose their hair as they feel there are other, more important things to worry about. However, there's no right or wrong way to feel and whether you lose some or all of your hair, the experience can be very distressing.

Hair loss is such a visible side effect of treatment, and can change how you look and view yourself. Men and women often express negative feelings about losing both the hair from their head and other body hair.

Hair loss may also make you feel vulnerable and exposed. You may see it as a constant reminder of your treatment, labelling you as a 'cancer patient' or feel that hair loss has prevented you keeping your diagnosis private. Some people find that they adjust quickly to hair loss. Others find that it takes longer, or is more difficult to accept and adapt to than they imagined.

'I felt like I'd lost a massive part of my identity. I also felt a lot of guilt about obsessing over it and being so upset, when I felt as though I should be grateful I was able to receive treatment.'

Mia

'I was in total denial about breast cancer for ages and losing my hair was what "gave the game away".'

Ann

In some cultures and religions hair has a particular significance. If hair has a special significance for you, losing it may affect your cultural or religious identity as well as your body image or self-esteem, making it even more difficult to come to terms with. If you are finding these feelings overwhelming you may wish to speak to your specialist nurse or a member of your specialist team, or access further counselling and support.

While some people describe hair loss as the most difficult side effect to deal with, others find that the experience of losing their hair isn't as upsetting as they thought it would be.

If there's a chance that you will lose your hair, your specialist, chemotherapy nurse or specialist nurse will talk to you before treatment starts about what might happen. This should also include information about any risk of permanent hair thinning or loss that could happen due to the treatment (see page 46). As well as talking about practical issues such as caring for your scalp or wearing a wig, you can also discuss your feelings about losing your hair and what support might be available to help you adjust to it.

Each person will find their own way of dealing with hair loss, but it can be helpful to talk to others who have been through the same experience. You can call our free Helpline on 0808 800 6000 to talk through ways of doing this. See the 'Further support' section on page 48 for more details on how Breast Cancer Care can support you during this time.

'I was surprisingly OK about it. To me it was just part of the treatment I had to go through and not nearly as big a deal as I might have expected. The days when I felt really ill on the chemo it was actually quite nice not to have to bother about my hair.'

Sandra

Other people's reactions

You may feel that losing your hair means that you will need to tell people about your diagnosis when you would prefer not to. However, it's up to you who you tell. Some people tell just their family and close friends, while others are happy to let everyone know. People will respond to you losing your hair in different ways, and you may find some reactions difficult to understand.

A change in appearance may make you feel less confident about socialising with friends and family. However, withdrawing from your social life may make you feel more isolated or that your diagnosis is preventing you from doing the things you enjoy. Many people find continuing to meet up with others is a useful distraction and helps to keep some normality.

You may feel anxious about other people's reactions at first, but these feelings should gradually improve over time. It might help to talk to others who have experienced hair loss. See 'Further support' for more information.

'I made no effort to hide any part of my illness, I didn't have the energy! Also, I never felt as though I should have to, I didn't choose or cause what was happening to me.'

Mia

'A number of friends/acquaintances avoided me when we passed in the street, sometimes suddenly turning in the opposite direction or hastily searching in a bag – I felt that had I kept my normal hair this would not have happened. I think they felt embarrassed and avoided me out of not knowing what to say.'

Ann

'I showed my new look to everyone – work, family and friends – everyone said I still looked beautiful and my dearest friend said I showed the world a new meaning to headscarf fashion.'

Lorraine

Talking to your children

If you have children, whatever their age, you may wonder what to tell them about your breast cancer. Studies have shown that children are less anxious if they know what's happening, and that it can be less frightening for them to know what is going on even if they don't fully understand. Even though you may find it difficult, in most cases talking with your children about your breast cancer will make them feel part of what is happening to you and may help them talk more openly about any concerns they have.

Your children may find it upsetting to see you without any hair and it might help if you prepare them for the fact that this may happen. Tell them what, if anything, you are going to wear on your head and let them know hair loss is rarely permanent.

You may find it helpful to read our **Talking with your children about breast cancer** booklet. If you have young children you may find our story book **Mummy's Lump** useful.

'My son found my hair loss the hardest. He found it very hard to look at me with no hair at first and would often put my wig or a hat on me. He didn't speak about it at the time but has since said how he really didn't like it.'

Sarah

'My six-year-old daughter cried when I told her I might lose my hair. However, she coped well with my hair loss and my wig even provided some entertainment value!'

Christine

'I told my seven-year-old nephew I had a poorly head and the doctor said I had to have my hair cut so he could make it better and the headscarfs were to keep my head warm. I showed these to my nephew before having my head shaved and he tried on my headscarfs and said they looked really cool... so when he saw me the week later wearing them he was not at all worried.'

Lorraine

Which treatments cause hair loss?

Chemotherapy

Chemotherapy is a treatment that uses anti-cancer drugs. Chemotherapy drugs target rapidly dividing cells, so they damage some healthy cells as well as cancer cells. The healthy cells damaged include the cells in the hair follicles, which is why chemotherapy can make your hair fall out. As well as the hair on your head, this can also affect your body hair including eyebrows, eyelashes, nasal and pubic hair, and chest hair for men (see page 34).

Not all chemotherapy will make your hair fall out. Some drugs don't cause any hair loss, some cause hair to thin, while others make hair fall out completely. How much hair you lose will depend on the type of drugs you are given and the dose. Drugs that are given in smaller doses on a weekly basis or are taken by mouth are less likely to cause hair loss. If you are receiving a combination of chemotherapy drugs you are more likely to have hair loss. Your specialist or your chemotherapy nurse will talk to you about your treatment and how likely you are to lose your hair.

Your hair will usually start to grow back after your chemotherapy has finished (see page 42). Some people find that it starts to grow back before they have completed all their chemotherapy.

The charity Cancer Hair Care has useful information on its website (cancerhaircare.com) explaining the hair loss and regrowth cycle in more detail.

Hair loss from breast cancer treatment is almost always temporary, but in rare cases it can be long-term or permanent. For information on coping with long-term or permanent hair loss see page 46.

Targeted therapy

Most targeted therapies do not cause hair loss. However, this will depend on the drug and whether you are given it alongside other drug treatment like chemotherapy. Your specialist team will tell you if hair loss is a side effect of a targeted therapy they are recommending.

Radiotherapy

Radiotherapy uses high-energy x-rays to destroy cancer cells. Like chemotherapy, it affects healthy cells as well as cancer cells so can cause hair loss, but only in the specific area being treated. This means that you will only lose hair from that area. If you're having radiotherapy to the lymph glands in your armpit as well as your breast you'll lose underarm hair in the area that has been treated. Men may lose chest hair from the part of their chest that has been treated.

If you are being given radiotherapy to treat secondary breast cancer in the brain (breast cancer that has spread to the brain), you may experience hair loss. If you're having stereotactic radiotherapy (a very precise radiation treatment given to targeted areas), this will just be in the area being treated. If you're having radiotherapy to the whole brain, this will usually cause complete hair loss on the head. The radiographer (person trained to give radiotherapy) or specialist nurse will talk to you about the likelihood of you losing your hair before treatment starts. Any hair you lose will usually grow back, although it can take several months. It may not grow back completely and might be patchy.

Hormone (endocrine) therapy

Taking hormone therapy such as tamoxifen, anastrozole (Arimidex), exemestane (Aromasin) or letrozole (Femara) can cause hair thinning. This is usually mild and might only occur for a short time. However, in some cases it can continue throughout treatment, which can be many years. People don't always tell their specialist team about hair thinning when they're having hormone therapy so it's difficult to say how common this is.

If you start hormone therapy after chemotherapy you may experience the effects on your hair from both types of treatment.

Preparing for hair loss

Some people find that being prepared beforehand means it's easier to come to terms with losing their hair.

You might want to think about having your hair cut short (or you may even decide to shave it off completely using hair clippers) before your treatment starts. For many people this is a way of taking control rather than waiting for hair loss to happen, which in turn can help reduce stress.

Some people ask about donating their hair if they have it cut off. There are organisations that you can donate your hair to for them to make into wigs for anyone with hair loss (see page 52).

If you think you'll want to wear a wig, it can be useful to choose it before you lose your hair. Some people begin trying out wearing their wig before treatment starts to help them get used to it. It can also help if you want a wig that matches your natural hair colour and style. See page 26 for more information on choosing a wig.

Some hospitals and local organisations offer hair loss services that provide practical support and information about hair loss for people who are likely to lose their hair, or have already lost it. These may give you:

- tips on caring for your hair and scalp before, during and after your treatment
- information about cold caps (see page 16)
- the opportunity to try on different types of headwear, providing an alternative to wearing a wig
- advice on feeling more confident about your new appearance
- information on hats, headscarves and fringe hairpieces and where to get them
- practical tips on using makeup to give the illusion of eyelashes and eyebrows

You can ask your specialist team or local cancer information centre for more information about any services available in your area.

The charity Cancer Hair Care has further information to help people prepare for hair loss at cancerhaircare.com

'Before I even started treatment, a great friend took me wig shopping so I wouldn't have to do it at a time I'd feel emotional. That was one of the best things that happened to me.'

Eithne

'One day I washed my hair and it felt like my whole head was shedding and clumps coming out, I had handfuls of hair just coming out. Despite knowing that this was going to happen nothing fully prepares you for the emotional effects of your hair coming out in handfuls.'

Amanda

'I was so scared by it I didn't even dare have my head shaved. I slept in a hairnet so that I wouldn't find hair on the pillow. I used silk pillowcases and only washed my hair once a week. I tried everything I could but nothing worked, I lost all of my hair all over my body.'

Karen

'I decided to book my hairdresser to come to my home to shave it. I had two of my dearest friends with me during the time, I put the iPod on with some happy music.'

Lorraine

Preventing hair loss during treatment

Scalp cooling

Cooling the scalp can sometimes prevent or reduce hair loss from the head for both men and women having chemotherapy. This technique works by reducing the blood flow to the hair follicles, which means that the amount of drugs reaching the hair follicles is also reduced.

The effectiveness of scalp cooling varies depending on the drug and dose used, and from person to person. If you do keep your hair, you may find that it's patchy or thinner.

There are two widely available ways of cooling the scalp. One method uses a cold cap, which is a hat filled with a gel that can be chilled. The other system uses a small, refrigerated cooling machine to pump a liquid coolant through the cap. In both cases the cap is worn before, during and after chemotherapy, so scalp cooling can mean you're at the hospital for longer. Scalp cooling is often less effective on African and Caribbean hair, so increased cooling times may be recommended.

You can ask your specialist or chemotherapy nurse if scalp cooling is available and whether it would be suitable for you. The condition of your hair and any previous use of chemicals on it may affect how well scalp cooling works. Your chemotherapy nurse will discuss this with you.

Some doctors have been concerned that scalp cooling may increase the risk of developing secondary cancers in the brain or scalp due to the possibility of constricted blood vessels limiting the amount of chemotherapy reaching the area. However, studies looking at many people who had scalp cooling during their chemotherapy treatment have found that scalp cooling does not increase this risk.

If you're having radiotherapy, hair loss can't be prevented.

Tips for scalp cooling

To improve the chances of the cold cap being effective, it's important the cap covers the whole scalp and fits snugly. You may find the cap

uncomfortable, as it's very cold and often quite heavy. Some people get headaches, but these usually wear off quickly once the cap is removed. You don't need to cut your hair short before you start using a cold cap. However, if your hair is very long or thick it may be helpful to cut it to reduce some weight and make it more manageable.

So that the cold can reach the scalp the chemotherapy nurses may recommend that the hair underneath the cap is lightly dampened. Before the cap is fitted the hair can be sprayed with lukewarm water. A water spray bottle is ideal for this.

Applying a small amount of conditioner to the dampened hair can help with removing the cold cap at the end of treatment. There is no need to leave the conditioner in your hair unless you feel unable to wash it out.

Before the cap is put on the hair should be gently combed back using a widetooth comb or your fingers so that the front hairline is visible. This is especially important if you have a fringe.

Being able to tolerate the cold will vary widely from person to person. The intense feeling of discomfort or even aching that is felt in the first 10–15 minutes of the treatment should go away as you get used to the cold. Wearing warm layers, sipping hot drinks and covering yourself with blankets can also help.

As the hair will still be damp when the cold cap is removed you may find it more comfortable to take a hat or head covering with you to wear on the way home.

Things like water spray bottles, hair conditioner and extra layers may not be available in the chemotherapy suite so you may want to bring your own.

'I did use a cold cap for my first treatment, it was unpleasant but not intolerable. Unfortunately it didn't work for me, but it was a comfort to know that I had done absolutely everything I could to try and save my hair. I also met a few people in chemo that it had worked very well for, so I felt glad I'd given it a chance.'

Mia

'People who knew me could see the difference but those that didn't know me before just thought I had thin hair... [I did have] constant worry about was it falling out more today than yesterday, was there more in the shower, on my brush and on the pillow than the previous day. In a way buzzing it all off probably relieves you of that anxiety.'

Niki

Looking after your hair during treatment

If chemotherapy doesn't cause hair loss, it may make it brittle, dry or straw-like, so it's a good idea to treat your hair as gently as possible. Hormone therapy can also cause the hair to thin and feel fragile.

Due to its structure, African and Caribbean hair is the most vulnerable to damage of all hair textures so it is recommended to take special care and use specific products.

The following tips may be helpful for all hair types:

- try not to wash your hair for about two days after chemotherapy, especially if having scalp cooling
- use a mild, unperfumed shampoo and conditioner
- try not to wash your hair more than twice a week
- use warm rather than hot water
- pat your hair dry rather than rubbing it
- brush or comb your hair gently with a soft hairbrush or wide tooth plastic comb
- avoid plaiting or braiding it as this may damage your hair
- avoid using elastic bands to tie back long hair
- avoid any hair colours and dyes, perms, relaxers and other products containing strong chemicals
- avoid products containing alcohol, such as hairspray, which can irritate the scalp
- avoid excessive heat from hair straighteners, hairdryers, hot brushes and heated rollers

- massaging the scalp may help by improving the blood supply to the hair follicles
- avoid hair extensions and weaves as these can also weaken the hair

Hair thinning, poor condition or a dry and itchy scalp can also be related to poor diet, stress and drinking too much alcohol. Changes to your diet and lifestyle may help improve the condition of your hair. You can find out more about a healthy diet from our booklet **Diet and breast cancer**.

'I kept it moisturised with natural organic oils, wore satin head scarves (important for retaining moisture in Afro-Caribbean hair).'

Rebekah



If you lose your hair

Hair loss will usually begin gradually within two or three weeks of starting chemotherapy. For some people it may be sooner and more sudden. Your scalp might feel tender as the hair thins and falls out.

The first signs that you are losing your hair may be finding hair on the pillow in the morning or extra hair in your hairbrush. This can still be a shock and very distressing even when you're prepared for it to happen. Wearing a soft hat or turban in bed to collect loose hairs might help.

Scalp care

Remember to protect your scalp from the sun. Cover your head when in the sun or use a high protection factor sun cream at all times, as the scalp is particularly sensitive.

We lose a lot of heat from our heads so cover your scalp in colder weather.

If your scalp is dry, flaky or itchy you can use unperfumed moisturiser or natural oils such as almond or olive oil to help with this. Some people use aromatherapy oils, but it is best to consult a trained aromatherapist as the oils can be very strong.

What to wear?

Many people choose to wear wigs, headscarves, hats or other headwear until their hair grows back. There are many different reasons for this, from keeping warm, for cultural or religious reasons, to concern about what other people might say.

Different people prefer to wear different things so choose what you feel comfortable with at the time. You may want to wear a wig on special occasions or when going out, but feel more comfortable wearing a cap around the house. Or you might prefer not to wear anything on your head.

'I did not want to always look like a cancer patient. There were many times, though, that my wig was too hot in the summer months. So I often would wear a hat or scarf.'

Veronica

'I chose not to wear a wig. I didn't want to feel artificial or someone else's hair on my head, plus it was a hot summer and I was always feeling hot anyway.'

Androulla

'I didn't even consider a wig. I've always had quite short hair anyway so no hair wasn't a massive change. I was more than happy to wear a baseball cap.'

Andrew

'[I] never [felt] very comfortable but knew that I did a lot more in the wig than I would ever have done without it.'

Ann



Wigs

Modern wigs are natural looking and comfortable. They can be made from real or synthetic hair or a mixture of both, and are available in many different colours and styles for both men and women.

'I lost count of how many people genuinely commented on how well my hair had grown back when I was wearing [my wig], and really not aware it was a wig!'

Kim

Help with the cost of your wig

Entitlement to a wig varies across the NHS. You may be entitled to a free synthetic wig on the NHS if:

- you are an inpatient when the wig is supplied
- you or your partner are receiving Income Support, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, income-related Employment and Support Allowance, Pension Credit Guarantee Credit or Universal Credit, and meet the criteria
- you are entitled to or named on an NHS Tax Credit Exemption Certificate
- you are named on an HC2 certificate

Some hospitals may provide you with a free wig whether or not you meet any of the conditions above. To find out if you're entitled to a free wig, talk to your chemotherapy or specialist nurse.

If you are entitled to a free wig through the NHS, you can get this from your hospital or a wig shop in your local area (see 'Your wig fitting appointment' right).

You may be entitled to a new wig on the NHS every six months if necessary. Your chemotherapy or specialist nurse should be able to advise you on how to go about getting your replacement wig.

If you aren't entitled to a free wig you can still get one through the NHS at a subsidised rate if you have a low income. To apply for this you'll

need an HC1 form, which you may be able to get from your hospital or from nhsbsa.nhs.uk/nhs-low-income-scheme

If you're having treatment as a private patient the cost of a wig may be covered in your policy. Otherwise you'll need to pay for one.

Only wigs made of synthetic hair are available on the NHS, although real hair wigs can be supplied if you are allergic to acrylic wigs. If you prefer to buy a wig made of real hair, you'll need to pay for it. Real hair wigs are usually more expensive (see page 26).

You don't have to pay VAT (Value Added Tax) on a wig when hair loss is caused by cancer treatment. You will need to complete a VAT exemption form – which most stores will provide at the time of purchase – and send it off. The tax can't be claimed back at a later date.

You may be able to get financial help towards the cost of a wig from Macmillan Cancer Support (see 'Useful organisations' on page 49) but your doctor, nurse or social worker will need to apply on your behalf.

Your wig fitting appointment

Some hospitals have specialists who may be able to fit you with a wig or advise you about other wig suppliers. If not, your chemotherapy or specialist nurse will be able to advise you on where to get your wig.

Your hospital may have a limited range, so if you're paying for your wig yourself you may prefer to go to a hairdresser, department store or wig retailer. This is usually more expensive. You can find a list of wig suppliers on our website at breastcancercare.org.uk/headwearsuppliers

Being fitted with a wig can be a time when you have to face the reality of losing your hair, and it can be an upsetting experience. Experienced wig specialists understand this and will do their best to make you feel at ease.

Most wig fitters have a private room where you can be fitted and try on wigs, but if not, don't be afraid to ask for one.

You may find it helpful to take a relative or friend with you for support and to help you choose.

'I took my daughter with me to help choose. That was really helpful. The shop was fantastic and spent lots of time helping me choose the right one, cutting it to just my style, showing me how to put it on etc... I felt I looked really good – in fact it looked better than my hair had!'

Sandra

Choosing a wig style

If it's important to you to match your wig to your hair colour and style, you may want to choose one before your hair falls out. Or you may decide to have a complete change.

If you haven't yet lost your hair the wig should be quite tight when fitted so that it gives a good fit later on. This can be adjusted later if needed.

Synthetic and real hair wigs

Synthetic wigs are light and easy to care for. They're often pre-styled and can be washed and left to drip dry. They're also cheaper than real hair wigs.

The cost of a real hair wig will depend on the length and style you choose. As a rough guide, synthetic wigs cost around £60 upwards, while real hair wigs can cost from £100 but are often substantially more.

They also need to be handled more carefully. They may need professional cleaning and restyling. If you're not feeling well during treatment, you may find this more difficult.

Getting your wig professionally styled

Wigs can be cut and styled to make them look more natural and feel more personal. The hair in some wigs is packed very densely, which can give them a slightly unnatural look. This can be thinned out by trained hair professionals to make the wig look like your own hair. It's a good idea to check that your hairdresser or wig consultant has experience of cutting wigs. You can find a directory of wig cutting salons in your area at mynewhair.org

'I wanted to be/look as much like the old me as possible. My hairdresser was absolutely wonderful – tweaked my excellent NHS wig to take out heaviness in the bob and shaped hair around the face to resemble my normal style.'

Ann

Tips on wearing a wig

As long as your wig fits snugly, it shouldn't move around your head. However, if you're worried about your wig slipping or falling off, try securing it with hypoallergenic double-sided tape, which is available from wig suppliers. One side of the tape sticks to the inside of the wig while the other side sticks to your scalp. A wig specialist can also talk to you about other ways of securing your wig.

Wigs can sometimes feel hot and itchy. You can try wearing a thin cotton lining or skullcap under your wig. You can buy these from wig suppliers or make your own by cutting up a stocking or pair of tights.

If you have an 'off-the-shelf' wig and wear it every day it will last about three to four months. After that the elastic gets looser and this affects the fit, although it may be possible to replace the elastic. You may be entitled to a new wig on the NHS every six months if necessary (see page 24).

Avoid excessive heat or steam (such as from an oven or iron) if you have a synthetic wig as it can make the hair shrivel. Don't get too close to flames from cookers or candles, which can melt synthetic hair and frizz real hair.

'[It] took a very long time before I stopped feeling that it would blow off; I deliberately went to a local viewpoint in high winds to road test it.'

Ann

Other headwear

Some people choose not to wear a wig. Often men decide not to wear a wig despite experiencing hair loss from treatment.

Whether or not you wear a wig, there may be times when you want to cover your head. Hats, headscarves and turbans can be found in a wide variety of styles and colours and can help you feel more confident about the way you look. They can also keep you warm in winter and protect your head from the sun in summer.

'I did not want to try to look the same... [After shaving my head] I chose a headscarf to match my next day outfit and said to the mirror "You look OK" and I wore headscarves in all different designs and colours from that point forward.'

Lorraine

'I wore and still do wear a lot of colourful wraps and scarves, I learnt to tie them in various ways from YouTube videos.'

Rebekah

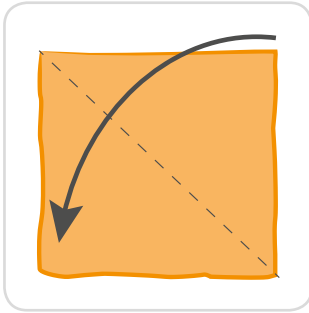
Headscarves and bandanas

Headscarves and bandanas (a triangular or square piece of cloth) can be worn in many different ways to create a variety of looks. Choose different colours, patterns and textures to suit your mood and coordinate your headwear with your outfit.

The most comfortable headscarves are made from a natural fabric that's gentle on the scalp and allows it to breathe. Soft cotton is probably best, as satin and silk materials can slide off the head more easily.



How to tie a headscarf or bandana



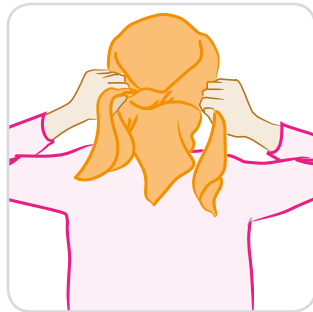
1. Lay a square headscarf flat with the underside facing up. Fold the headscarf diagonally into a triangle.



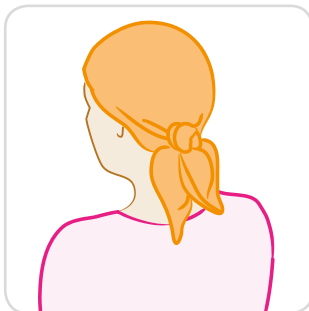
2. Place the headscarf on your head with the folded edge about 2.5cm below your natural hairline and the points at the back.



3. Tie the outer two points into a double knot behind your head over the middle triangle point (if you are doing more than the basic headwrap you may only need a single knot).



4. The flap should be underneath the knot. Pull any excess headscarf from under the knot.



Now you have a basic headwrap, you can experiment with different looks and styles.

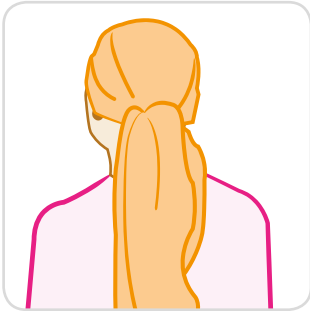
Tips

For a basic headwrap you will need a scarf at least 75cm x 75cm. For more elaborate styles it needs to be 100cm x 100cm.

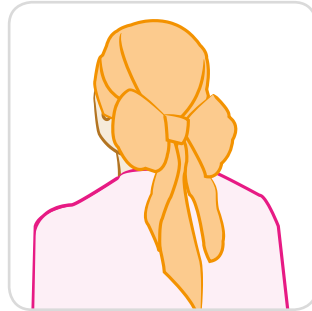
To give more height and a better head shape you can:

- scrunch or pleat the long edge of the headscarf
- roll the edge of the headscarf around a 25cm long foam tube (such as a finger bandage) before putting it on your head
- place a foam shoulder pad on the crown of your head under the headscarf. You can attach it with double-sided tape available from wig shops

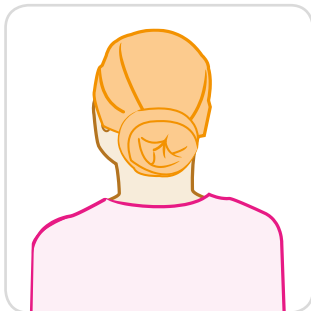
Variations



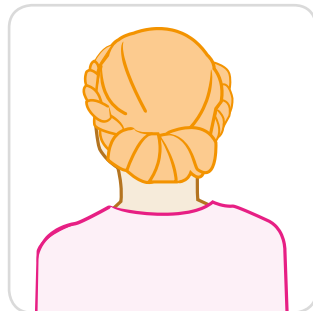
Wear the ends of the headscarf loose – particularly if it's sunny or if you're going to wear a hat on top.



Tie the ends of the headscarf in a bow or gather all the ends in an elasticated ponytail band to help make loops and tails to form a bow.



Twist the three ends together – it will look like a twisted rope – and wrap tightly around the knot for the look of a bun or rosette. Secure the loose ends by tucking them through the centre of the bun.

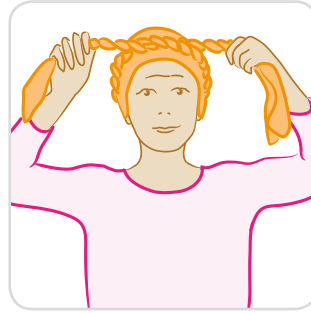


If you have a twisted headband (see page 32), pull all three ends together and tuck securely over and under the knot to give the illusion of a French hair roll.

How to create a twisted headband



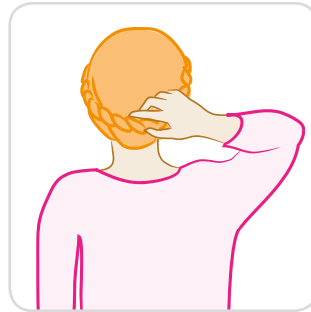
1. Twist the long ends separately.



2. Bring them forward and tie them at the front of your head.



3. Continue twisting and tucking the ends in around your head.



4. At the back, twist the short end and tuck it in.

Tips

You may find it helps to twist one end at a time and secure it with a hairgrip, paperclip or elastic band while you twist the other one.

You can vary this by twisting in coloured cord, beads or a contrasting headscarf to match what you're wearing.

Hats

When looking for a hat, you may want to choose a style that can be pulled down to cover your hairline. As well as specialist hat shops and department stores, wig and headwear suppliers often stock suitable hats. You can also buy hats and caps with detachable hair pieces.

Turbans

Cotton or jersey turbans are light, comfortable and easy to wash. They can be bought in some department stores, chemists, hospital shops and from wig and headwear suppliers.

Fringes

If you normally have a fringe, you may feel that you still don't look right no matter what headwear you choose. Worn under a headscarf or hat, you may find that a fringe hairpiece on a Velcro band works for you. Fringes can be trimmed and shaped to suit and are available from wig suppliers.

You can also buy hairpieces that you can fix under the back of a hat. They give the appearance of hair and, like the fringes, can be styled to suit you.

You can find a list of suppliers of hats, turbans and fringes on our website at breastcancercare.org.uk/headwearsuppliers

'I bought a fake fringe with long side pieces, which worked very well under a hat and was cooler than the wig in summer. Very good when running.'

Ann

Changing the emphasis

Some people feel more confident if attention is directed away from their hair and their head. There are a number of ways of doing this that might help.

Jewellery such as earrings, necklaces, rings and brooches can attract attention. You could experiment with makeup, using different colours to emphasise your eyes or lips. Finding an item of clothing that gives you confidence – a jacket, shoes or a bag – can also attract attention.

Body hair

You may find that you lose some or all of your body hair after starting chemotherapy, including eyebrows, eyelashes, nose hair, underarm and pubic hair, and chest hair for men. This can be a shock, especially if you're not prepared for it.

Avoid highly perfumed deodorants if you've lost hair under your arms, as they can irritate the skin.

'I also lost all body hair, which was actually a blessing as it meant at least I didn't have to shave my legs, bikini line and armpits during chemo. Every cloud has a silver lining! I lost all my eyelashes and nasal hair too.'

Amanda

'[Losing my body hair] felt terrible – like a sexless doll. [I] had not really taken on board that it was not only hair on my head that would go.'

Ann

Eyelashes and eyebrows

Losing your eyelashes and/or eyebrows can be upsetting, especially if you're not expecting it to happen. Some people don't lose their eyebrows or eyelashes, other people's eyebrows may thin, and others lose them altogether.

'I hated having no eyelashes and eyebrows. I found my eyes watered a lot and so was forever blowing my nose!'

Sandra

'I wasn't so troubled about losing my hair... What bothered me most was losing my eyelashes and less so, my eyebrows. I looked creepy and ill. [My eyelashes] have always been my best feature.'

Androulla

'I used a lovely eyebrow pencil and I used grey eye shadow and a liquid eye liner softy around my eyes. My friends said with my head shaved it showed my eyes more.'

Lorraine

Eyelashes

If you lose your eyelashes you might find that your eyes get sore easily. If your eyes are inflamed ask your chemotherapy nurse for some drops to help reduce the soreness.

You can use eyeliner to draw along the top of your eyelid to give the illusion of lashes. Choose eyeliner either the colour of your own lashes or a contrasting colour that goes with your skin tone.

If your eyes aren't feeling sore or sensitive you may want to try false eyelashes but check first with your chemotherapy nurse. Some people can be allergic or sensitive to the adhesive used to keep the eyelashes in place.

False eyelashes come in many different styles, lengths and thicknesses. You could choose eyelashes that are similar to your own, or try ones that are completely different. Makeup counters in department stores are a good source of help, or try a local beauty salon.

Eyelash extensions (usually applied in a salon and designed to last longer than eyelashes you apply yourself) are not recommended.

'My eyes were sore due to having no lashes to filter. I used eye drops.'

Niki

'I used false eyelashes, which made a massive difference but were quite a hassle! I'm now using an eyelash serum.'

Mia

You can find quick and simple makeup video tutorials for people dealing with hair loss and skin changes after breast cancer treatment on our website at [breastcancercare.org.uk/makeup-tutorials](https://www.breastcancercare.org.uk/makeup-tutorials)

Eyebrows

If you lose your eyebrows, or find that they are thinner, you may be very conscious of how this changes the way you look. You can recreate a natural appearance by using eyebrow makeup in a shade that matches your original hair colour.

To create a natural eyebrow shape



1) Hold an eyebrow pencil vertically against your outer nostril, in line with the inner corner of your eye. Mark a small dot above your eye. This is where your eyebrow will start.



2) Move the top of your pencil so it is now in line with the centre of your pupil, keeping the bottom end against your outer nostril. Mark another dot, slightly higher than the first one. This is where your eyebrow arch will be.



3) Line up the top of your pencil with the outer corner of your eye, and mark a final dot. This is where your eyebrow will end.



4) Join the dots using eyebrow makeup.

There are all kinds of eyebrow products available from the major cosmetic companies – from eyebrow shapers and finishers to pencils, pens and powders. Makeup counter staff in department stores and chemists will be able to give you a demonstration and advise you on the most suitable products for your skin type and colour.

Stick-on eyebrows for people experiencing hair loss are available in a range of shades and shapes, and come in synthetic or human hair. You can find them at many cosmetic retailers and wig suppliers (see [breastcancercare.org.uk/headwearsuppliers](https://www.breastcancercare.org.uk/headwearsuppliers)). Stick-on eyebrows are developed for people who have hair loss for a range of reasons and not specifically for people experiencing hair loss from chemotherapy treatment. Chemotherapy can cause skin changes and sensitivity so the adhesive may cause irritation. Ask your nurse specialist or chemotherapy nurse which adhesives might cause irritation and test a small area of skin first to check for any reactions.

Some people choose to have their eyebrow shape recreated with permanent or semi-permanent makeup (also known as micropigmentation). Micropigmentation is a form of tattooing that can create a long-lasting eyebrow shape. Microblading is semi-permanent and uses a slightly different technique where pigment is implanted into the skin. A precision hand tool is used instead of a machine to recreate hair-like eyebrows. These treatments are not available on the NHS so you will have to pay privately. As the results are usually permanent, make sure you choose a reliable provider that has good recommendations. There is more information about permanent makeup on the Cancer Hair Care and NHS Choices websites.

See page 44 for information on when your eyelashes or eyebrows might grow back.

‘I didn’t like losing my eyebrows! I was fine with the hair on my head going but losing body hair and specifically my eyebrows was not a good look!’

Andrew



Look Good Feel Better workshops

Look Good Feel Better is an organisation offering a free two-hour skincare and makeup workshop to help women with the visible side effects of cancer treatment, including redefining the eye area for women who have lost their eyebrows and/or eyelashes. The workshops are held throughout the UK in hospitals, cancer care centres and the community and cater for women of all skin tones.

Visit lookgoodfeelbetter.co.uk for more details and to find your nearest workshop. Alternatively you can call 01372 747500 or email info@lgfb.co.uk

Many of our Living with Secondary Breast Cancer services include a Look Good Feel Better workshop as one of the monthly sessions. Find out more by calling our free Helpline on **0808 800 6000**.



When your hair grows back

For most people their hair almost always starts to grow back once their treatment is over, and sometimes it may even start to grow back before it's finished. It may be weak and fragile or softer to begin with but over time the condition and texture of hair becomes stronger. Hair can sometimes grow back differently to what it was like before treatment. For example:

- the colour may change
- the texture may be different
- it may be curlier
- it may be straighter

This change may only be temporary but occasionally it will be permanent. For some people having hair grow back differently to what they are used to can be very difficult. You may feel it is another change to your appearance that you need to cope with, especially if in the short term you're not able to treat or style your hair in the way you always have done.

The rate of hair growth varies from person to person but most people will have a full covering of hair after about three to six months, although for some people this can be patchy.

Many women wonder whether there is anything that can speed up hair regrowth.

There is some evidence that a drug called minoxidil may help when applied to the scalp. Minoxidil can also be found in some hair loss treatments.

You can talk to your GP, a dermatologist (doctor who specialises in skin problems) or a trichologist (person who specialises in hair loss problems but is not medically trained) about possibly using minoxidil.

The condition of our hair is strongly linked to lifestyle factors including diet. A healthy diet that is balanced and varied provides all the nutrients needed for healthy hair. You can find out more about a healthy diet from our booklet **Diet and breast cancer**.

While your hair is growing back it will be very delicate and liable to break easily, so it's best to treat it with care. You might find the tips on page 18 useful. You can also talk to a hairdresser about how best to look after your hair.

You may also find there is an in-between period when your hair is growing back but you aren't quite ready to go out with your own hair. You may choose to continue wearing a wig or other headwear until your hair is longer.

'I was unprepared for how it looked [when it grew back] – at first it was grey and curly, which distressed me. As it grew a little longer it became really difficult to manage as I had a combination of short hairs along with the hair that hadn't fallen out. I hadn't even contemplated that and even now, almost a year after chemo finished, I am still dealing with this hair mismatch.'

Christine

'I like using conditioner to make it soft rather than spiky, and I used [hair thickening fibres], which is excellent for adding a bit of thickness and covering bald patches.'

Mia

'My hair grew back fairly patchily so I shaved my head at the beginning in order to keep it looking even. Even now, nearly three years after my hair has grown back it's still a lot thinner than it was before so I tend to keep it very short.'

Andrew

'It was a lot sooner than I had expected – only three months into my six months of chemo. I wouldn't have purchased a second wig had I have known my hair would start growing again after the first type of chemo had finished.'

Kim

'I took frequent selfies and shared with a Breast Cancer Care Forum group – very encouraging to see everybody's hair returning and share stories.'

Ann

Eyelashes and eyebrow regrowth

Other body hair, such as your eyebrows and eyelashes, may grow back more quickly or more slowly than the hair on your head. Eyelashes can be quite patchy when they start to grow back. They may take up to a year to grow back fully although they will usually grow back in about six months after treatment finishes. Recent studies have also shown that applying the drug bimatoprost to the eyelids may improve the regrowth of eyelashes. You can talk to your GP, a trichologist or a dermatologist about whether this is an option for you.

Eyebrows will usually start to grow back after treatment finishes, but they may grow back thinner or patchier. They tend to grow back slower than head hair and in rare cases they don't grow back at all.

'My eyelashes grew back about three quarters of how much I had before. My eyebrows grew back but much less and so the colour is much lighter.'

Androulla

Colouring your hair

It's best to wait until your hair is longer and your hair and scalp are in good condition before applying permanent hair colour. Although there is little evidence-based research in this area Cancer Hair Care recommends that as long as your hair and scalp are healthy and you have about 2cm of hair growth it's fine to go ahead. This is due to scalp sensitivity and the fragility of the new hair growth.

For some people this may be six months to a year, for others it will be sooner. It might be a good idea to discuss with your hairdresser about when to begin colouring your hair. Before you have a permanent hair dye applied your hairdresser should check how your scalp and hair may react. They may recommend henna or vegetable-based dyes as these tend to be gentler on the hair and scalp.

Temporary or semi-permanent dyes are a good way to find out if a hair colour suits you or until you are ready to try a permanent colour.

For more information see My New Hair and Cancer Hair Care websites (details on page 50).

Donating your wig

Once you no longer need your wig you may wish to consider donating it to an organisation called Wigbank. See wigbank.com for details.

Permanent hair loss or thinning

Hair loss caused by chemotherapy is almost always temporary.

There is some evidence that chemotherapy may result in prolonged or permanent hair loss, particularly with taxane drugs (such as docetaxel or paclitaxel). Permanent hair loss is described as incomplete regrowth of hair six months or more after completing treatment.

At the moment there is no definite evidence to say how often this happens, which may mean that this possible side effect is not included in written information given to patients undergoing chemotherapy.

As hair loss is common in both people with cancer and in the general population, it's often difficult to be sure whether problems with hair regrowth are due to treatment, genetics or other factors such as extreme stress or medical conditions, or a combination of these things.

After radiotherapy, any hair that you lost from the treated area will usually grow back (see page 13). However, it's also possible that the hair may not grow back. This will depend on the dose of radiotherapy and the number of treatments you've had.

Once you have finished taking hormone therapy, your hair should return to how it was before treatment (see page 42). However, this may take some time and for some may not fully return to the same thickness.

If you are concerned about hair loss when making decisions about treatment, talk to your specialist team.

Treating long-term hair loss

If hair loss after treatment persists, you may wish to ask for advice from a specialist.

There are a few dermatologists (doctors who specialise in skin problems) who have a specialist interest in managing hair loss from various causes. They are able to offer information and advice to people experiencing hair loss. You can find the contact details of your nearest specialist on the British Hair and Nail Society website bhns.org.uk

There are also a number of trichologists (people who specialise in hair loss problems but are not medically trained) who may also offer advice. The Institute of Trichology is able to provide details of registered practitioners. See their website trichologists.org.uk for more information.

Camouflaging long-term hair loss or thinning

Concealers

A concealer is a temporary cosmetic that can be used to disguise thinning hair and camouflage the scalp. They can be bought over the counter as coloured shampoos, mousses, creams, wax pencils, hair fibres or aerosols and should be applied as directed.

Hair replacement systems

Cosmetic hair restoration is a solution for hair loss in which human hair can be fixed to the scalp. This is usually only an option for people who have permanent hair loss.

The most common type of hair replacement system works by attaching a fine mesh to any remaining hair, allowing hair to be added where needed to give the illusion of a full head of hair.

Making it look like hair is growing from the scalp, the replacement can usually be cut to recreate the hairstyle you had before your hair loss. However, these types of hair replacement can be time consuming and expensive.

Further support

Losing your hair can be a particularly distressing side effect of treatment. Finding ways to feel more confident in your new appearance can help you to accept and adjust to what has happened, and feel more like yourself again.

Everyone's experience of hair loss is different and there's no right or wrong way to feel. It's important you find your own way of dealing with it, but it can be helpful to talk to others and find out what worked for them. Some areas have support groups where you can talk to other women who have experienced hair loss. Your specialist nurse or cancer information centre will also be able to tell you about local support.

You can find your local cancer information centre through the NHS Choices website at [nhs.uk/service-search](https://www.nhs.uk/service-search)

Breast Cancer Care

Breast Cancer Care's Moving Forward courses and information are here for anyone who has had a diagnosis of primary breast cancer, helping you approach life after treatment with more confidence.

Our Someone Like Me service puts you in contact by phone or email with someone else who's had breast cancer and who's been trained to help.

You can also chat to other people going through breast cancer on our online discussion Forum.

If you have secondary breast cancer, our Living with Secondary Breast Cancer meet-ups provide helpful support and advice in a relaxed environment. Regular sessions include hair and scalp care or a Look Good Feel Better masterclass. Visit breastcancercare.org.uk/lwsbc for more information.

For more information on how we can support you call our free Helpline on **0808 800 6000** or visit breastcancercare.org.uk

Useful organisations

Headwear, wig and eyelash suppliers

The Breast Cancer Care website lists a number of organisations who supply headwear designed to meet the needs of people experiencing hair loss. You can find these at breastcancercare.org.uk/headwearsuppliers

A Head of Our Time

Website: aheadofourtime.org

A worldwide organisation of people – mainly women treated for breast cancer – who have been left with permanent hair loss following chemotherapy.

Alopecia UK

PO Box 341, Baildon, Shipley BD18 9EH

Urgent enquiries: 07763 293687 or 07983 810490

Email: info@alopecia.org.uk

Website: alopeciaonline.org.uk

A charity supporting people with all types of alopecia in the UK, offering information, advice and support to people of all ages with alopecia. They have an online discussion forum for men called 'Bloke Zone'.

British Hair and Nail Society

Email: info@bhns.org.uk

Website: bhns.org.uk

Brings together dermatologists, specialists and scientists interested in hair loss and nail disorders and provides patient information leaflets.

Cancer Hair Care

The Caring Hair Studio, 5A Middle Row, Stevenage,

Hertfordshire SG1 3AN

Telephone: 01438 311322

Email: support@cancerhaircare.com

Website: cancerhaircare.com

A website for people who are experiencing hair loss due to chemotherapy. It has detailed information on scalp and hair care, wigs and headwear, and hair regrowth, and includes video case studies and tutorials.

Institute of Trichologists

107 Trinity Road, Upper Tooting, London SW17 7SQ

Telephone: 0845 604 4657

Email: enquiries@trichologists.org.uk

Website: trichologists.org.uk

A professional association of trichologists. Includes a directory of qualified trichologists.

Look Good Feel Better

West Hill House, 32 West Hill, Epsom, Surrey KT19 8JD

Telephone: 01372 747 500

Email: info@lgfb.co.uk

Website: lookgoodfeelbetter.co.uk

Offers professionally run skincare and makeup workshops in hospitals and cancer support centres around the country for women living with cancer. Their website and workshops include practical tips for women who have lost their eyelashes and/or eyebrows. You can also order a 'Confidence Kit' from their website, which includes a DVD and booklet full of tips.

My New Hair

PO Box 626, Durham DH1 9LJ

Email: info@mynewhair.org

Website: mynewhair.org

Lists a national network of independent salons and professionals who offer a wig styling service for people suffering from cancer and medical hair loss.

Strength in Style

Website: toniandguy.com/charity/strength-in-style

Strength in Style is a service provided by Toni & Guy in partnership with Macmillan Cancer Support. It aims to provide people experiencing hair loss with a local point of contact who is able to give practical support and advice. Their consultants are specially trained to help choose, fit and style your wig, and give advice on regrowth. Visit their website to find your nearest participating salon.

Hair donating

Little Princess Trust

Broadway House, 32–35 Broad Street, Hereford HR4 9AR

Telephone: 01432 352 359

Email: info@littleprincesses.org.uk

Website: littleprincesses.org.uk

Provides real hair wigs to boys and girls across the UK and Ireland that have lost their own hair through cancer treatment.

Other organisations

Macmillan Cancer Support

89 Albert Embankment, London SE1 7UQ

General enquiries: 020 7840 7840

Helpline: 0808 808 0000

Website: macmillan.org.uk

Provides specialist information and financial support to people with cancer, including one-off grants that can be used towards the cost of a wig.



4 ways to get support

We hope this information was helpful, but if you have questions, want to talk to someone who knows what it's like or want to read more about breast cancer, here's how you can.



Speak to trained experts, nurses or someone who's had breast cancer and been in your shoes. Call free on **0808 800 6000** (Monday to Friday 9am–5pm, Wednesdays til 7pm and Saturday 9am–1pm).



Chat to other women who understand what you're going through in our friendly community, for support day and night. Look around, share, ask a question or support others at **forum.breastcancercare.org.uk**



Find trusted information you might need to understand your situation and take control of your diagnosis or order information booklets at **breastcancercare.org.uk**



See what support we have in your local area. We'll give you the chance to find out more about treatments and side effects as well as meet other people like you. Visit **breastcancercare.org.uk/in-your-area**

We're here for you: help us to be there for other people too

If you found this booklet helpful, please use this form to send us a donation. Our information resources and other services are only free because of support from people such as you.

We want to be there for every person facing the emotional and physical trauma of a breast cancer diagnosis. Donate today and together we can ensure that everyone affected by breast cancer has someone to turn to.

Donate by post

Please accept my donation of **£10/£20/my own choice of £**

I enclose a cheque/PO/CAF voucher made payable to
Breast Cancer Care

Donate online

You can give using a debit or credit card at
breastcancercare.org.uk/donate

My details

Name _____

Address _____

_____ Postcode _____

Email address _____

We might occasionally want to send you more information about our services and activities

Please tick if you're happy to receive email from us

Please tick if you don't want to receive post from us

We won't pass on your details to any other organisation or third parties.

Please return this form to Breast Cancer Care, Freepost RRRKZ-ARZY-YCKG,
Chester House, 1-3 Brixton Road, London SW9 6DE



About this booklet

Breast cancer and hair loss was written by Breast Cancer Care's clinical specialists, and reviewed by healthcare professionals and people affected by breast cancer.



For a full list of the sources we used to research it:

Phone **0345 092 0808**

Email **publications@breastcancercare.org.uk**



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Phone **0345 092 0808**

Email **publications@breastcancercare.org.uk**



When you have breast cancer, everything changes. At Breast Cancer Care, we understand the emotions, challenges and decisions you face every day, and we know that everyone's experience is different.

For breast cancer care, support and information, call us free on **0808 800 6000** or visit **breastcancercare.org.uk**

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