

# Body Image Changes

## Just the Facts

**T**reatment can affect your body and your life in ways that are hard on your self-esteem. Weight loss or gain, loss of stamina, skin reactions, puffy face -- all of these can be distressing if you think of your body as being who you are. Fortunately, most of the side effects of therapy, which affect appearance and stamina, are temporary.

The first step in coping with body changes is to direct your energy and thoughts toward what you can and will do for yourself. Paying attention to skin care, diet, exercise, and positive attitudes are healthy ways to cope with body image changes. Finding ways to express your feelings about the changes is very important.

## Your Goals:

- ✓ Maintain a confident and positive self-image.
- ✓ Take care of skin
- ✓ Build stamina with exercise
- ✓ Wear attractive and comfortable clothing
- ✓ Get professional help if needed

## Important Signs and Symptoms:

**Report symptoms to doctor or nurse during clinic hours today.**

- ☐ Feeling very sad most of the day, very angry or losing interest in life because of changes in the body.
- ☐ Not taking care of self (not exercising, dressing, or caring for skin).

## What You Can Do At Home:

**Maintain a confident and positive self-image.**

- ➡ Express your feelings to trusted family members, friends, nurse or social worker.
- ➡ Talk with other people who have had similar treatment about what they did and how they coped with changes in body image.
- ➡ List your best points. Then list your options on what you would like to try to maintain a good body image.
- ➡ Laugh! Humor is a fine way to cope. Treat yourself to funny movies, TV shows, books, or even people.

### **Consider using a hair alternative.**

- ➡ Buy or borrow a wig. Most offices of the American Cancer Society can tell you how to obtain or borrow a wig. Many of them have a “Wig Bank.”
- ➡ Use a headwrap. Making headwraps out of scarves is easy. A headwrap can complement your looks. The emphasis should be on color and texture rather than on complicated tying techniques. The book, Beauty and Cancer, by Diane Doan Noyes and Peggy Mellody, gives instructions on headwraps, skin care, makeup, clothing, nutrition and exercise.
- ➡ Try turbans, scarves, hats or caps. Head coverings protect against drafts, enhance appearance, and help retain body heat.



### **Wear attractive and comfortable clothing.**

- ➡ Wear colorful clothing. Chemotherapy and radiation tends to make skin pale, sallow or ruddy. Colors and interesting patterns can decrease the intensity of the skin changes.
- ➡ If your face becomes very round or puffy, wear a “V” shaped neckline.
- ➡ If you have lost a lot of weight, try a round or oval neckline.
- ➡ Avoid any garment that might puncture or break the central intravenous line such as front clasping underwire bras or pins. Soft fabrics drape best over catheters.



### **Take care of skin.**

- ➡ Select skin care products that you like and are inexpensive, fragrance-free, hypoallergenic and alcohol-free.
- ➡ Cleanse skin twice a day. Mild soap and water is the most basic cleanser, especially good for oily skin. Cleansing creams are good for dry and normal skin because of their moisturizing effect. All cleansing products should be applied gently to avoid pulling the delicate surface of your skin. Use caution to avoid bruising the skin.
- ➡ Use a moisturizer to help skin retain its moisture.
- ➡ Avoid alcohol-based products.
- ➡ Avoid hot water.
- ➡ Wear sunscreen or protective clothing when outside.
- ➡ Report any skin changes such as rash or inflammation to the doctor or nurse.

### **Build stamina with exercise.**

- ➡ Exercise daily. Exercise is one of the simplest and most effective ways to reduce stress, increase stamina, and impart a feeling of well being.
- ➡ Begin slowly with low intensity exercise, such as walking. Let your body be your guide. Your body will tell you what your limits are. Don't overdo. A good rule of thumb is you should never be out of breath. You should be able to talk.

### **Get professional help.**

- ➡ Talk with your doctor, nurse or social worker for a referral to a counselor.