

SAN LUIS DERMATOLOGY AND LASER CLINIC

NEWSLETTER

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PREVENTING CHEMOTHERAPY HAIR LOSS

One morning I was seeing a long time patient. I inquired about his family.

“Well you know, Mary has had quite a battle with breast cancer,” he said.

“Oh, no. I didn’t know.” I replied.

He related a yearlong ordeal of surgery, radiation, and three courses of chemotherapy.

“Surprisingly, the thing that bothered her most is losing her hair. It was six months before it looked halfway decent. On top of everything else she went through, it was a real emotional hardship.”

Hair loss is one of the hardest parts of the cancer battle for female patients to bear.

Everyone in church knows what it means for the lady wearing a scarf over her head. Wigs are helpful but they don’t erase the constant reminder of the life-threatening illness.

A number of years ago, I read about a method for decreasing hair loss during chemotherapy and bringing it back more quickly afterwards. I tried to publicize it to my physician friends at the time but I wasn’t very effective. This time, I will inform patients and let the word spread that way.

A research project was performed on two groups of patients undergoing chemotherapy. One group applied 1cc of 2% minoxidil twice daily to the entire scalp. Another group used a placebo. Both groups started at the onset of chemotherapy and continued for four months after its cessation.

The findings were impressive: The minoxidil group lost hair more slowly than the placebo group and it regrew more quickly after chemotherapy. The difference in regrowth time was 50 days, almost two months.

If you or a family member or friend anticipate undergoing chemotherapy, consider using minoxidil. It now comes in a 5% solution and that should be even more effective.