



Children's
Cancer and
Leukaemia
Group

the EXPERTS
in CHILDHOOD
CANCER

Anna loses her hair

A children's guide to hair loss as a result of cancer treatment





Hair loss is a common side effect of having chemotherapy and of radiotherapy to the head

This book tells the story of Anna, Jack and Laura who all lose their hair while having treatment for cancer and helps young children to understand what might happen.

Parents and carers are encouraged to read the book with their child so they can answer any questions they might have about losing their hair.

Meet Anna

Anna lives with her mum, dad, and their little puppy, Charlie. Anna has long blonde hair and her favourite thing is to dress up in lots of different costumes out of her fancy dress box. She loves to pretend to be a superhero and she has a pink cape with a big letter 'A' on the back. Anna feels like she has magical powers whenever she wears her cape.



Anna goes to hospital

Anna has been feeling poorly for a while and she has headaches. Her mum and dad take her to the hospital to see a doctor who says that Anna has a brain tumour, which is a type of cancer. The doctor says the tumour is the size of a little pea inside her head. Anna likes peas, but she doesn't like the idea of having one inside her head!

The doctor is kind and friendly and he says he will help Anna feel better. He says Anna needs to have treatment to try and make the tumour go away.

The doctor explains that certain treatments, such as chemotherapy and radiotherapy, can help make the cancer go away but can also make other things happen to the body. It can stop hair from growing and can make hair fall out.

Anna is sad about losing her hair but the doctor says that it happens to lots of children when they have treatment. He tells her that sometimes it might fall out more than once but it almost always grows back once treatment has finished.

He says that it is a good idea for Anna to talk about it with a health play specialist called Penny at the hospital.



Anna finds a new friend

While in the hospital waiting room, Anna plays with toys and books. A boy called Jack starts to play with her. Jack tells Anna he is having treatment for cancer too. His cancer is in his blood.

Jack says he has met lots of doctors and nurses at the hospital who are all very helpful. They have told him all about what happens while having cancer treatment.

Anna asks him, 'Are you going to lose your hair?'

Jack replies, "Yes, I think so. Penny told me all about it"



Anna talks about losing her hair

Penny is a health play specialist at the hospital. She explains that Anna's hair will not start to fall out straight away, but it will begin about two weeks after starting treatment. Sometimes, not all of the hair will fall out and there may be some patches of hair left. Penny explains that Anna's eyelashes and eyebrows may also fall out.

Penny says that it helps children with long hair like Anna to have their hair cut short before it starts to fall out. This can help children get used to having less hair. It also means a trip to the hairdressers, which Anna is quite happy about.



Before having her hair cut, Penny turns the hospital play room into a hair salon so Anna can pretend to be a hairdresser which is lots of fun. While cutting her doll's hair shorter, she talks to Penny about losing her own hair. Penny says it is always good to talk about anything that makes us worry or feel unsure. Anna feels better about the idea of losing her hair after talking to Penny.

Penny explains that some children like to have pretend hair to wear called a wig. This can be put on and taken off whenever Anna wants and she can even choose the one that she likes best! Anna is quite happy about this. Penny also says that some children don't want to have a wig and like having no hair. Other children like to wear hats or head scarves which help to keep their heads warm. Anna thinks about her fancy dress box at home and knows that she will enjoy wearing a different hat each day.

When treatment ends, Penny says hair starts to grow back and sometimes it can be a different shade of colour or even curly! Anna has always wanted curly hair so she starts to think about what her new hair might look like.

Anna goes to the hairdressers

The next day, Anna and her mum go to the hairdressers. Anna has her hair cut short. This feels different at first but she soon gets used to it. Anna's mum also has her hair cut short on the same day and everyone loves their new shorter hair styles!

Anna also chooses a wig. She has lots of fun trying on all of the different styles and colours – it was like dressing up! She decides to have a blonde wig that looks a lot like her own hair.



Anna starts treatment

Soon, it is time for Anna to start treatment. She is wearing her pink superhero cape which helps her feel super strong.

Anna sees Jack again at the hospital. This time, he is wearing a red baseball cap.

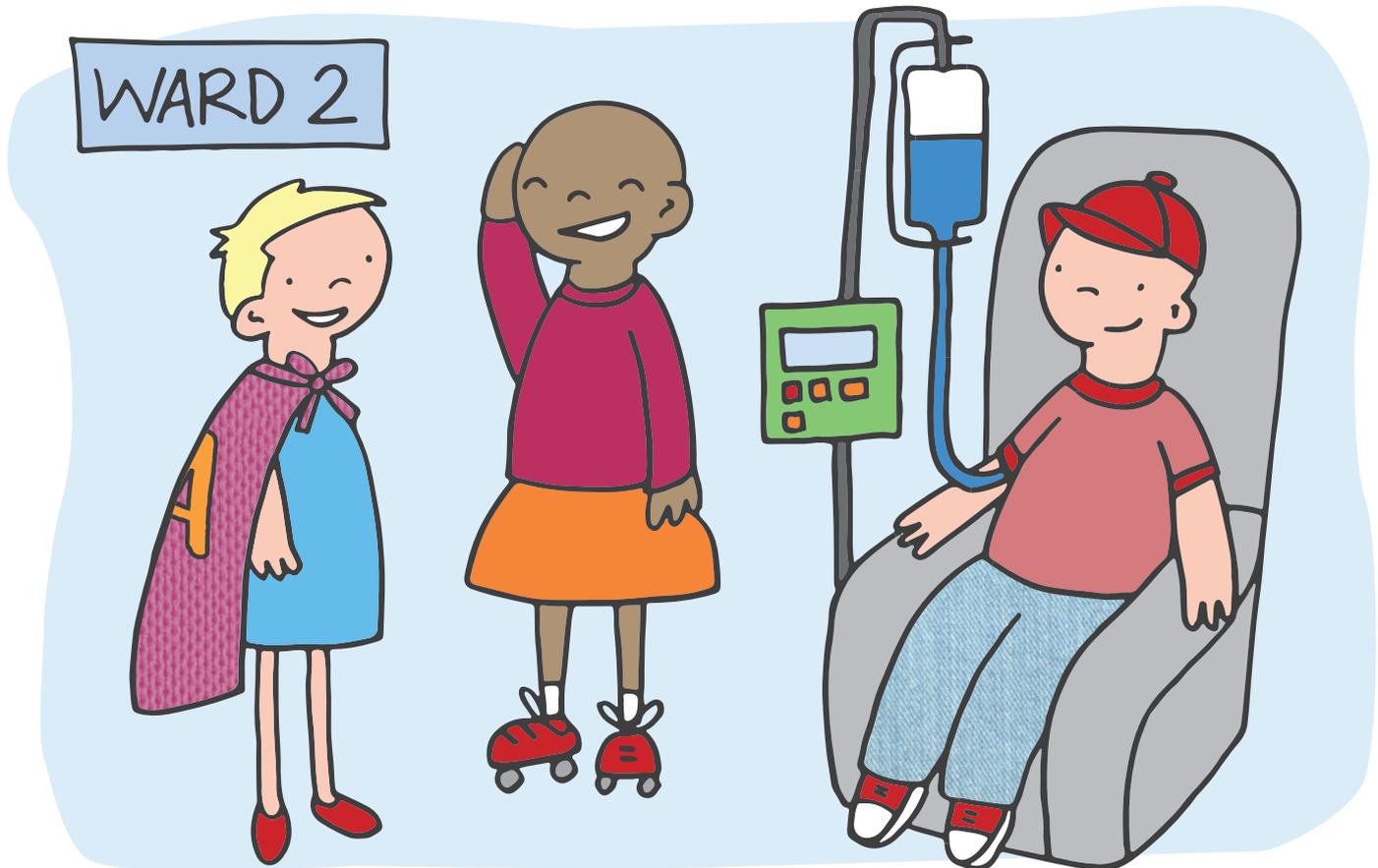
“Hi Jack, I like your hat!” says Anna.

Jack replies, “Thanks. Dad took me shopping to choose a hat ready for when my hair starts to fall out. I love it so much that I’m wearing it already! I’ve got a green one to match my uniform for when I go back to school”.

Anna meets another girl called Laura whose hair has already fallen out.

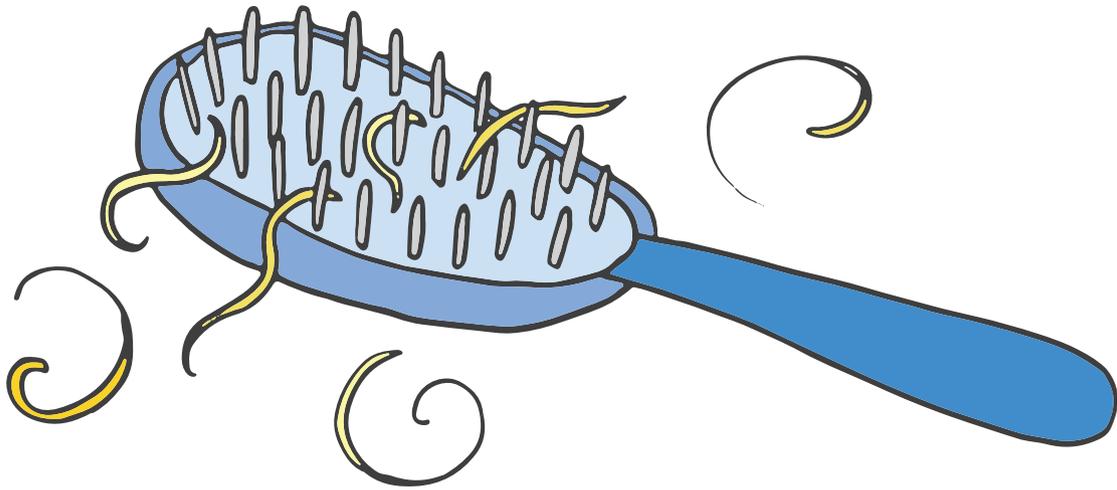
“What does it feel like when your hair falls out? Does it hurt?” asks Anna.

“It felt different at first but it didn’t hurt at all. I soon got used to having no hair and I feel exactly the same as before. I had a special wig made for me which I wear sometimes but I also like to wear my sparkly hat too,” replies Laura.



Anna loses her hair

A couple of weeks later, Anna's hair starts to fall out. At first, she finds lots of hair on her pillow and hairbrush. Her hair becomes thinner and then most of it falls out. Her eyebrows and eyelashes fall out too, but Anna was expecting this to happen so she feels ok.



The skin on her head feels very smooth and warm, and she can feel her fingertips when she touches her head. Anna's dad likes to stroke and kiss her head which makes Anna giggle because it tickles!

Sometimes, the skin on her head feels dry and itchy, and Anna's mum puts cream on from her doctor to make it feel better.

When Anna goes back to clinic, she sees that her friend Jack has lost his hair too. She thinks he looks good without hair. Anna always wears her superhero cape to hospital and Laura wears her red roller skates, which makes everyone at the hospital smile.



After treatment ends

A few months later, Anna's hair starts to grow back. It is quite thin but she is sure it will become thicker after a few weeks.

Anna likes her new hair as it is very soft and even a little bit curly! And she still loves to wear her superhero cape too.



Useful sources of information for families

Real-hair wigs

The Little Princess Trust provides free real-hair wigs to children and young adults in the UK and Ireland up to the age of 24. They work with a large team of independent, professional wig suppliers who will supply and fit the real hair wig for your child as local to you as possible. If it isn't possible to attend a salon, visits to the ward or home can sometimes be arranged.

www.littleprincesses.org.uk

Synthetic wigs

Free synthetic wigs are available via the NHS for children under 16 and 16-18 year olds in full-time education. They are light and easy to look after.

Young lives vs Cancer

www.younglivesvscancer.org.uk

Support and advice for anyone affected by childhood cancer

Macmillan

www.macmillan.org.uk

Support and advice for anyone affected by cancer



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Children's Cancer and Leukaemia Group (CCLG) is a leading national charity and expert voice for all childhood cancers.

Each week in the UK and Ireland, more than 30 children are diagnosed with cancer. Our network of dedicated professional members work together in treatment, care and research to help shape a future where all children with cancer survive and live happy, healthy and independent lives.

We fund and support innovative world-class research and collaborate, both nationally and internationally, to drive forward improvements in childhood cancer. Our award-winning information resources help lessen the anxiety, stress and loneliness commonly felt by families, giving support throughout the cancer journey.

CCLG publications on a variety of topics related to children's cancer are available to order or download free of charge from our website. If you have any comments on this booklet, please contact us at publications@cclg.org.uk.

Our work is funded by donations. If you would like to help, text '**CCLG**' to **70300** to donate **£3**. You may be charged for one text message at your network's standard or charity rate. CCLG (registered charity numbers 1182637 and SC049948) will receive 100% of your donation.

Originally written by Penelope Hart-Spencer, Health Play Specialist, The Christie NHS Trust, Manchester and reviewed by the CCLG Information Advisory Group comprising parents, carers, survivors and multiprofessional experts in the field of childhood cancer.

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