



[Authoritative facts](#) about the skin from the [New Zealand Dermatological Society Incorporated](#).

[Home](#) | [Procedures](#)

## Hair pieces and wigs

[Hair loss](#) may be permanent, such as in androgenetic alopecia ([male pattern hair loss](#)), [female pattern hair loss](#) and some cases of [alopecia areata](#). It may also be temporary, due to medications (e.g. hair loss due to cancer treatments), severe [telogen effluvium](#) or most cases of [alopecia areata](#). Whether it is permanent or temporary, patients with hair loss can experience low self-esteem and depression.

There are several options for the treatment of hair loss. These include pharmaceutical hair restoration treatments such as [minoxidil](#) or [finasteride](#), [hair replacement surgery](#), and the use of hairpieces and wigs.

Hairpieces and wigs are often used to disguise hair loss and have the following benefits:

- Can be used in patients with any type of hair loss condition
- Provide an instantaneous result whereas other treatments may take months or years for visible improvements
- Safe to use

### Uses of hairpieces and wigs

The use of wigs dates back to the 4th century BC where the wearing of wigs was used to show the ranking of office or status of the wearer. Nowadays, both males and females wear wigs or hairpieces for cosmetic and/or medical reasons.

They are also used temporarily in patients undergoing lengthy hair transplant sessions. Results from hair transplantation may take a year or more before the full benefits are seen. In addition, hairpieces are often used where hair replacement surgery has not been successful.

### Types of hairpieces and wigs

Hairpieces and wigs come in many different forms and can be added to existing hair or directly to the scalp to give the appearance of a fuller head of hair. Other names for hairpieces and wigs are hair weaves, hair extensions, toupees, non-surgical hair replacements and partial hair additions. These external hair devices are made from human hair, synthetic fibres such as acrylic, or a combination of both.

The advantages and disadvantages of acrylic and human hair wigs are shown in the following table:

Wig type	Advantages	Disadvantages
Acrylic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Easy to wash and care for</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Easily damaged by electric styling tools, or rush of heat from opening oven door, steaming pots, BBQ fires.</li> <li>• Hot to wear in summer</li> <li>• Last for approximately 6–9 months</li> </ul>
Human hair	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give a very natural appearance</li> <li>• Dryer or tongs on low setting can be used for</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need to wash and condition with care</li> <li>• Colour can fade</li> <li>• Depending on make may need professional cleaning once a month</li> </ul>

- styling
- Cooler to wear
- Lasts for up to 2 years if well cared for

Partial hair additions are becoming more popular than wigs and can be attached to existing hair or the skin by a number of different techniques. Weaving, fusion, bonding and cabling are techniques used to attach new hair to the existing hair. Techniques that use the skin as the anchor site include adhesives such as double-sided tapes and waterproof liquids. Hairpieces should not be sutured to the scalp because of the risk of scars and infection.

## Access to hairpieces and wigs

In some countries, hospitals, charities or societies hold workshops where professional demonstrations of hairpieces and wigs are given. For example, in New Zealand, Look Good Feel Good, a charitable programme of the Auckland Cancer Society run cosmetic workshops throughout the country to improve the self-esteem of women dealing with the side effects of cancer.

Hairpieces and wigs are available through hair replacement centres and many small salons. Although insurance generally does not cover male or female pattern hair loss, it may cover the cost of hair replacement when hair loss is caused by disease or other abnormalities. In New Zealand, the Ministry of Health's Disability Services will provide funding for people who suffer from serious hair loss as a result of a medical condition (not including that of a hereditary nature) such as alopecia areata and certain cancer therapies, e.g. chemotherapy or radiotherapy.

### Related information

#### References:

##### On DermNet NZ:

- [Hair loss](#)
- [Male pattern hair loss](#)
- [Female pattern hair loss](#)
- [Alopecia areata](#)
- [Hair replacement surgery](#)

##### Other websites:

- [Howstuffworks: How Hair Replacement Works](#)
- [Look Good Feel Better Programme: Auckland Cancer Society](#)
- [Wig subsidy FAQ](#) - Ministry of Health (New Zealand)

#### Books about skin diseases:

See the [DermNet NZ bookstore](#)

**Author:** Vanessa Ngan, staff writer

DermNet does not provide an on-line consultation service.  
If you have any concerns with your skin or its treatment, see a [dermatologist](#) for advice.

Created 2005. Last updated 08 Sep 2007. © 2007 NZDS. Disclaimer.