



Dermatology Patient Education

Hair Loss & Hair Restoration

When your hair starts to thin or fall out, it can be troubling. If you are experiencing hair loss, a dermatologist can help determine what type of hair loss you have and provide you with treatment options.

WHAT IS TYPICAL HAIR GROWTH?

When your hair grows normally, the following happens:

- About 90 percent of your hair is growing at any one time. This growth phase lasts between two and six years.
- Ten percent of your hair is in a resting (telogen) phase. This phase lasts two to three months. At the end of this phase, the hair falls out.
- When you shed a hair, a new hair from the same hair follicle (structure that contains the hair root) replaces it. This starts the growing cycle again.
- It is normal to lose 50 to 100 hairs a day, and this is no cause for alarm.
- The hair on your head grows approximately one-half inch per month. As you age, the rate of hair growth slows.

WHAT ARE COMMON CAUSES OF HAIR LOSS AND THEIR TREATMENTS?

Hair loss can have many causes.

Hereditary Hair loss

This is the most common cause of hair loss. It is also known as male-pattern baldness, female pattern baldness or androgenetic alopecia. You can inherit the baldness trait from either your mother's or father's side of the family. Hereditary hair loss can start in your teens, 20s or 30s or later, especially in women (after menopause). Men may see a receding hairline and bald patches, especially on top of their head. Women may see thinning hair and a wider part when they style their hair, but do not become fully bald.

While there is no cure for hereditary hair loss, medical treatments may help some people.

- **Minoxidil:** Approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to treat hair loss in both men and women. This topical treatment is available both over-the-counter and by prescription.
- **Finasteride:** An FDA-approved oral prescription for men only.



Androgenetic Alopecia: Male (L) and Female (R)

In addition, the FDA has approved laser brushes, combs and other hand-held devices that emit laser light for the treatment of hair loss. These devices may stimulate hair growth. Because the FDA classifies these products as medical devices, the products do not undergo the rigorous testing that medicines undergo. The long-term effectiveness and safety for these devices are not known.

Telogen Effluvium

Illness, stress, and other events can cause too many hairs to enter the resting (telogen) phase of the hair growth cycle. This leads to a large increase in hair shedding (effluvium). Most often bald patches do not appear. Instead, you see a lot of thinning. There is no treatment for telogen effluvium because, in many cases it goes away after one of these potential causes is no longer affecting your body. Some causes of telogen effluvium include:

- Childbirth or menopause
- High fever, serious infection, or a bad bout of the flu
- Major surgery or chronic (long-term) illness
- Thyroid disease (untreated)
- A diet lacking in iron or protein
- Birth control pills and other medicines
- Cancer treatments

Hair Care

Your hairstyle and even some of the products you use on your hair can cause hair loss. Follow these tips:

- **At-home hair colors, straighteners, and permanent waves:** Follow the instructions carefully. When done incorrectly or used too often, hair can become weak and break. If your hair becomes damaged and brittle from chemical treatments, it is best to stop using these treatments until your hair grows out.
- **“Long-lasting hold” styling products:** Try not to use these products daily. Using a comb to style your hair after you apply the product can cause the hair to break and can lead to hair loss over time.
- **Flat irons and curling irons:** Use these on dry hair on a low or medium heat setting and no more often than every other day. Leave these tools in place on your hair for no more than a second or two. No matter your hair type, excessive heat can damage your hair.
- **Braids, cornrows, ponytails, buns and hair extensions:** Avoid wearing these daily. These styles pull on the hair and can cause tension that leads to breakage. If the tension continues, permanent hair loss can develop.



Alopecia areata

Alopecia Areata

This is a rare autoimmune disorder that causes smooth, round patches of hair loss, about the size of a coin or larger. It can result in loss of all scalp hair and sometimes all body hair. Alopecia areata can affect children and adults of any age. Your genes can play a role in triggering alopecia areata. New research has found that some of these genes have a link to other autoimmune diseases, such as rheumatoid arthritis, type 1 diabetes, thyroid disease and celiac disease (gluten intolerance). More research is needed to confirm the role of genes in alopecia areata.

In most cases, hair regrows over time. Your dermatologist may recommend treatment to help you re-grow your hair more quickly:

- Cortisone injections (shots) in the scalp or other spots of hair loss
- Topical medications (medicines you apply to the bald spots)

Other causes of hair loss can include:

- **Cicatricial (Scarring) Alopecia:** A rare illness that causes patchy hair loss with itching, inflammation and pain around the hair follicles. The cause of this disease is unknown.
- **Tinea Capitis (Scalp Ringworm):** A fungus that can cause scaly patches on the scalp along with broken hair, redness, swelling, and even oozing on the scalp. This fungus is very contagious and most common in children.

In both cases, your dermatologist will recommend treatment to stop the inflammation and prevent lasting hair loss.

Hair Pulling: Hair pulling or twirling in young children is often a habit that goes away without treatment. Hair pulling in teens and adults may be a sign of an obsessive-compulsive disorder known as trichotillomania. Talk with your dermatologist if you are concerned about this habit in yourself or your child or teen.

WHAT IS HAIR RESTORATION?

A hair restoration procedure can increase the amount of hair in bald or thinning areas and, in some cases, restore your natural hairline. The type of procedure that your dermatologist recommends will depend on how much hair you have lost and how healthy your remaining hair is.

Hair Transplants: Areas of healthy hair growth are surgically removed and placed in bald or thinning areas of your scalp. The transplanted hair starts to grow three to six months after the last procedure and grows in fully about one year after the transplant.

Scalp Reduction: Primarily used if you have a large, bald area, this procedure involves removing a few inches of the bald skin, pulling the sides that have hair together, and sewing (suturing) them shut. This procedure decreases or even eliminates bald spots. For the best results, your dermatologist may recommend this procedure along with a hair transplant.

Scalp expansion: Prior to a scalp reduction, you may undergo this procedure that stretches the skin under the scalp for several weeks to make it easier to bring together for a scalp reduction.

For these hair restoration procedures, you can expect:

- The treatment will be performed in the dermatologist's office, an ambulatory surgery center, or other outpatient center using local anesthesia (numbs only the area to be treated)
- Natural-looking results
- To resume your normal activities in a few days
- To be able to do heavy exercise one week after a transplant or scalp reduction

While some risk is associated with these approaches to hair loss, they are rare and tend to be minor.

A board-certified dermatologist is a medical doctor who specializes in treating the medical, surgical, and cosmetic conditions of the skin, hair, and nails. To learn more about hair loss and hair restoration, log onto aad.org or call toll-free (888) 462-DERM (3376) to find a dermatologist in your area.

All content solely developed by the American Academy of Dermatology.

© 2016 American Academy of Dermatology

Images used with permission of the American Academy of Dermatology National Library of Dermatologic Teaching Slides

American Academy of Dermatology

P.O. Box 4014, Schaumburg, Illinois 60168-4014

AAD Public Information Center: 888.462.DERM (3376)

AAD Member Resource Center: 866.503.SKIN (7546)

Outside the United States: 847.240.1280

Web: aad.org

Email: mrc@aad.org