

HAIR LOSS

Society has placed a great deal of social and cultural importance on hair and hair styles. If hairlines start to recede or hair thins, both men and women may become very concerned about the loss. Without understanding why their hair is falling out, they may resort to so called "magic potions," megavitamins, scalp massage and electric treatments to encourage new hair grow. Hair loss is common nearly two out of every three men develop some form of balding. An even higher percentage of men and women have some form of hair loss during their lives. With correct diagnosis, many people suffering from hair loss can be helped.

Normal Hair Growth

About 90 percent of a person's scalp hair is continually growing, a phase that lasts between two and six years. Ten percent of the scalp hair is in a resting phase that lasts between two and three months. At the end of its resting stage, the hair is shed. Shedding 50 to 100 hairs a day is considered normal. When a hair is shed, it replaced by a new hair from the same follicle located just below the skin surface.

Scalp hair grows about one-half inch a month. Natural blondes typically have more hair (140,000 hairs) than brunettes (105,000hairs) or redheads (90,000 hairs). As people age, their rate of growth slows down.

Hair is mostly made up of a form of protein, (keratin) the same material found in fingernails and toenails. Everyone, regardless of age, should eat an adequate amount of protein to maintain normal hair production. Protein is found in meat, chicken, fish, eggs, some cheese, dried beans, tofu, grains and nuts.

Causes of Abnormal Hair Loss

Abnormal hair loss can be due to many different causes. People, who notice their hair shedding in large amounts after combing or hair brushing, or whose hair becomes thinner or falls out, should consult a dermatologist. It's important to find the cause and whether or not the problem will respond to medical treatment.

Dermatologists, physicians who specialize in treating diseases of the hair and skin, will evaluate a patient's hair problem by asking questions about diet, medications taken within the last six months, family history of hair loss, any recent illness and hair care habits. The dermatologist may ask a female patient about her menstrual cycles, pregnancies and menopause. After examining a patient's scalp and hair, he may check a few hairs under the microscope. Laboratory tests may be required which sometimes include examining a small sample of scalp under a microscope.

- **Childbirth.** When a woman is pregnant, she does not lose as much hair as usual. However, after a woman delivers her baby, many hairs enter the resting phase of the hair cycle. Within two to three months after delivery, some women may see large amounts of hair coming out in their brushes and combs. This can last between one to six months. The condition reverses completely in most cases.

- High fever, severe infection, severe flu. From four weeks to three months after a person has high fever or severe infection or flu, he or she may be shocked to see a lot of hair falling out. This condition usually corrects itself, but some may require treatment.
- Thyroid disease. Both an overactive thyroid and an under active thyroid can cause hair loss. Thyroid disease can be diagnosed by your physician with laboratory tests. The hair loss associated with thyroid disease can be reversed with proper treatment.
- Inadequate protein in diet. Some vegetarians, people who go on crash diets that exclude protein and those with severely abnormal eating habits, may develop protein malnutrition. When this happens, a person's body will help to save protein by shifting growing hairs into the resting phase. Massive hair shedding can occur two to three months later. Hair can then be pulled out by roots fairly easily. This condition can be reversed and prevented by eating the proper amount of protein and, when dieting, maintaining adequate protein intake.
- Medications. Prescription drugs cause temporary hair shedding in small percentage of people. Examples of such drugs are some blood thinners, some drugs used to treat gout and arthritis, some medications to treat depression, some medications for heart problems and high blood pressure problems, and high doses of vitamin A.
- Cancer treatment drugs. Certain types of drugs for treating cancer will cause hair cells to stop dividing. Hair shafts become thin and break off as they exit the scalp. This can occur one to three weeks after the cancer treatment. The patient may lose up to 90 percent of his or her scalp hair. The hair will regrow after treatment ends. Patients may be advised by their physicians to purchase wigs before treatment
- Birth control pills. Women who lose hair while taking birth control pills usually have an inherited tendency toward hair thinning. If hair thinning occurs, a woman can consult her gynecologist about switching to another control pill. When woman stops using oral contraceptives, she may notice that her hair begins shedding two or three months later. This may continue for six months when it usually stops. This is similar to hair loss after the birth of a child.
- Low serum iron. Iron deficiency occasionally produces hair loss. Some people don't have enough iron in their diets and some may not fully absorb the iron in their diets. Women who have menstrual periods may develop an iron deficiency. Low iron can be detected by laboratory tests and can be corrected by taking iron pills.
- Major surgery / chronic illness. Anyone who has major operation a tremendous shock to the system may notice increased hair shedding within one to three months afterwards. The condition reverses itself within a few months but people who have a severe chronic illness may shed hair indefinitely.
- Alopecia areata. In this type of hair loss, hair usually falls out, resulting in totally smooth, round patches about the size of a coin or larger. It can, in rare cases, result in complete scalp hair loss and loss of body hair. This disease may affect

children, women or men of any age. The cause of *alopecia areata* is unknown. Apart from the hair loss, affected persons are generally in excellent physical health. Dermatologists are able to treat some people with this condition. In some cases, the hair regrows by itself.

- Hereditary thinning or balding. Hereditary balding or thinning is the most common cause of thinning hair. The tendency can be inherited from either the mother's or father's side of the family. Women with this inherited trait develop thinning hair, but do not become bald. The condition is called *androgenetic alopecia* and it can start in the teens, twenties or thirties. There is no cure.....
- Ringworm of the scalp. Caused by a fungus, ringworm (which has nothing to do with worms) begins with small patches of scaling that can spread and result in broken hair. This contagious disease is most common in children and oral medication will cure it.
- Improper hair cosmetic use / improper hair care. Many men and women use chemical treatment on their hair, like dyes, tints, bleaches, straighteners and permanent waves. These treatments rarely damage hair if they are done correctly.
- However, the hair can become weak and break if any of these chemicals are used to often. Hair can also break if the solution is left on too long, if two procedures are done on the same day, or if bleach is applied to previously bleached hair. If hair becomes too brittle from chemical treatments, it's best to stop until the hair has grown out. Shampooing, combing and brushing too often can also damage hair, causing it to break. A cream rinse or conditioner may be used after shampooing to make it easier to comb and to make it more manageable. When hair is wet, it is more fragile, so vigorous rubbing with a towel, and rough combing and brushing should be avoided. Don't follow the old rule of 100 brush strokes a day, this damages hair. Instead, use wide toothed combs and brushes with smooth tips.
- Hairstyles that pull on the hair, like ponytails and braids, should not be pulled tightly and should be alternated with looser hairstyles. The constant pull causes some hair loss, especially along the sides of the scalp.
- Most hair shedding is due to normal hair cycle, and losing 50 to 100 hairs per day is no cause for alarm. However, if you are concerned about excessive hair loss or dramatic thinning, consult your dermatologist.
- Some forms of hair loss will regrow. Other forms can be treated successfully by a dermatologist. For the several forms of hair loss for which there is no cure at present, there is research in progress that looks promising for the future.