

Reasons for Female Hair Loss

Although when we think of baldness or hair loss, we traditionally think of men, some 40% of women have visible hair loss by age 40, according to the American Academy of Dermatology. The reasons for female hair loss often differ from those of male hair loss.

Hormonal Imbalance

Women's hormones often are imbalanced from age 30 on, brought on by excessive dihydrotestosterone (DHT conversion), which can cause hair thinning and hair loss. In addition, medical issues that are hormone-related can also contribute to hair loss. For example, women with thyroid issues produce not enough or too much thyroid hormone. This may affect the hair growth cycle.

Women with polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) create higher levels of androgens than normal, which causes hair growth in odd places, and hair thinning on the head. Pregnancy can result in thicker hair, but child birth produces a brief period of hair loss. Although the hair simply goes back to the way it was, the changes can be alarming. During menopause, 40% of women experience changes in their hair.

Last, birth control pills can result in hair loss as a side effect, especially in women with hereditary female pattern baldness. This is not a well-known fact, but if your hair loss coincides with starting to take the pill, it may be worth considering other contraception options. On the other hand, stopping the pill may also result in hair loss. In either case, it is important to talk to a specialist.

Diets, Weight Loss and Nutrition

You might want to be careful about fad diets, as some can actually cause you to shed your hair in addition to extra pounds. You may not associate hair loss with your diet, as it takes 3-6 months for hair to change after you've shed the weight. The good news: hair usually returns when you return to a healthy diet full of nutrients your body needs.

Nutritional deficiencies - whether caused by a diet or a medical condition - can also cause hair to fall out. For example, a vitamin D deficiency can be caused by obesity, lack of exposure to sunlight and digestive disorders. Copper, zinc and lysine deficiencies can also result in hair loss. Your diet must also include protein, which is essential for hair growth.

Medical and Psychological Issues

If you have recently faced a major life event, or are in a situation that produces constant and extreme stress, you may lose some of your hair. The process can go on for months, but is usually reversible.

A number of medical conditions - such as psoriasis of the scalp, alopecia areata (also known as spot baldness), folliculitis and seborrheic dermatitis - to name a few, can lead to hair loss. There are many treatments available for these conditions, but you must first see a specialist to get a proper diagnosis.

Women undergoing chemo and radiation treatment are also susceptible to hair loss. It is usually reversible once the chemo and radiation treatments cease.

Hairstyles and Hair Products

It has been shown that sodium lauryl sulfate, present in almost all shampoos at your local drug store, can have harmful effects on the body, including affecting your hair growth. Over-treated hair can also become more fragile because the chemicals used in hair dyes are often toxic. Similarly, using rollers too often or pulling hair back tightly can do some damage. Let your hair down for a while and give it a chance to grow back.

Genetics and Aging

For about 30 million women, hereditary hair loss - also called androgenetic alopecia -- is a condition that affects them at some point during their life time. For all women, aging causes hair to become thinner.

There are many causes of female hair loss, and we've just listed some of them. This is why it is important to speak to your doctor and establish the cause before beginning treatment.