

AGING AND HAIR LOSS IN WOMEN

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As a plastic and cosmetic surgeon, I see a larger percentage of women for minor or major cosmetic surgical procedures. One of the problems which is fairly common among women is the thinning of the number of hair follicles or actual loss of substance of the hair strands themselves. Also, segmental losses of hair in a single area can be seen as well. In women, the hairline usually stays the same, but there is thinning on the top of the head as far back as the vertex of the scalp, and it is possible to see a greatly reduced number of hair follicles as well as thinning or loss of substance of the hair strands. Combined with this, it is possible to also see premature graying of the hair and slower hair growth.

What are the causes of hair loss? Some diseases such as diabetes and thyroid disorders can cause hair loss problems. Inadequate nutrition is another cause for this. This may be in terms of the quantity and types of food that you eat or the lack of nutrients in the food. I have seen amongst a large population of women under my care that a well-balanced diet such as the Zone Diet, combined with highly nutrient food, keeps the hair and skin of these patients in much better condition. This means that one should eat a very small quantity of low-nutrient food such as pasta and bread and eat a high quantity of good antioxidant food such as green and other colored vegetables and fruits.

Certain medications for gout, arthritis, heart problems, or high blood pressure may cause hair loss. Also birth control pills can result in diminished hair for women, particularly if there is an androgenic component to these pills. Medical treatment such as chemotherapy or radiation therapy may also slow or completely eliminate hair growth.

Certain stress or illness can cause a telogen effluvium, which is a problem of hair falling out sometime after a stress or illness occurs. This usually comes back on its own, but it may be several months before it does so. Certain surgical procedures performed behind the hairline in the scalp can cause loss of hair, and surgery which causes loss of sensation of the scalp may do the same thing. Additionally, it should be mentioned that hair loss in both men and women can be a result of genetic predisposition.

Hair problems usually present as simply the fact that a person's hair is thinner and more gray than it should be for their age. Sometimes the hair falls out, either in small amounts on the comb or in larger clusters. This can be segmental such as alopecia areata which has to do with a round patch of hair completely falling out. The most common type of hair loss that I see in women is simply reduced substance of the hair strands themselves and reduction of the number of hair follicles. The hairline is usually not regressing, but the hair behind it certainly seems to thin out in a homogenous manner and sometimes remarkably.

What are the current treatments for hair loss? In my opinion, the first place to look is the overall nutritional pathway. I believe that every meal should be eaten with some accompanying protein intake because there is a continual need 24 hours a day for protein in the body, and this should be available. Also, avoidance of low-nutrient foods is essential so that the more highly nutrient foods can replace these in the diet. Sure, they are much more difficult to prepare, etc., as it is simply easier to nibble on some fast food than it is to prepare vegetables and meats for your meals. Certain supplements such as PABA (para-aminobenzoic acid) can reduce graying of the hair and biotin can improve hair growth.

Treatment of choice for hair loss is varied. If a woman is on androgen therapy as part of her hormonal therapy regimen, this can cause the testosterone to progress to a chemical known as dihydrotestosterone which reduces or inhibits hair growth. This can be improved by using Rogaine (minoxidil) or Finasteride. These should be used under the care of a dermatologist or an experienced hair specialist. In that regard, most hair transplant specialists are also well-versed in medical treatments for hair loss, because not everyone is a candidate for transplantation of hair.

I think that the best beginning pathway to treatment is to see a dermatologist or hair specialist so that they can diagnose the cause of your condition and then show you how to treat it better. One of the newer techniques which is being used is laser stimulation of hair. Even though we use lasers for hair removal, another wavelength stimulates hair growth at the follicle level by slightly stimulating the cellular production there. Laser treatments are available in dermatologist's or hair specialist's offices, and laser combs for home treatment are available on-line and can be ordered for home use.

Bottom line is that if you are experiencing any hair or actual hair loss, treatment is available for this. Ask your primary care physician, plastic surgeon, dermatologist, or hair specialist.