

Hair Loss

Hair loss has many causes and can be permanent or temporary. Most people have slower hair growth as they get older and some people, mostly men, go bald. Certain types of hair loss, however, can happen to anyone at any age. Medicines can sometimes help stop hair loss.

Each hair strand grows out of a hair follicle situated just under the surface of the skin. An average scalp has about 100,000 hair follicles. Hair strands on the scalp normally grow at the rate of about 1cm a month for two to five years, with different strands at different stages of growth. Eventually, a hair strand stops growing and after about three months falls out, as its hair follicle starts to grow a new hair strand. A healthy person loses about 50–100 hairs from the scalp every day. If the hair growing cycle is disrupted or hair follicles are injured or altered, hair strands may fall out early, not be replaced or be altered, leading to thinning, or partial or total baldness. Hair loss can also happen on other body areas. The medical name for hair loss is alopecia.

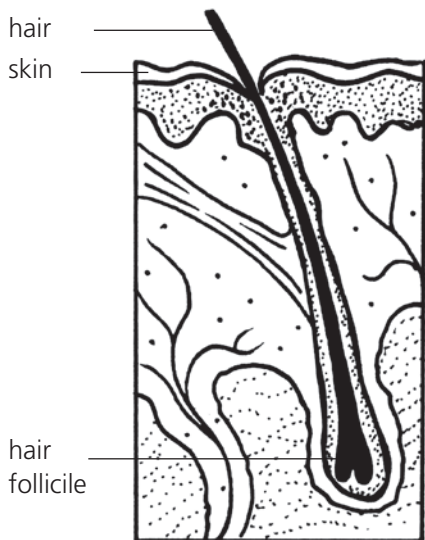
Some types and causes of hair loss

Androgenetic or androgenic alopecia (baldness)

Androgenetic alopecia is a change in hair growth on the scalp that happens to many men and some women. Short, fine, pale hair starts growing in place of normal hair, until eventually hair stops growing. Baldness is inherited, from either side of the family. It is also related to age and to blood levels of certain hormones.

Male pattern baldness – Hair is lost from the front of the head (receding hair line) and from the top of the head.

Female pattern baldness – Hair loss is less prominent than in men. Hair is lost



from the top of the head, without a receding hair line.

Alopecia areata

Hair is lost suddenly, in one or more circular patches on the scalp or body. It can develop into hair loss over the entire scalp (alopecia totalis) or the entire body (alopecia universalis). An immune system disorder may be the cause.

Cancer treatment

Chemotherapy and radiation treatments can affect hair follicles and cause growing hairs to fall out.

Trauma or Hairdressing

Overuse of chemicals (e.g., hair colours, perming solutions) and heat can damage hair and hair follicles. Regular tension on hair (e.g., tight rollers, tight plaits) or rough brushing can also cause hair loss. Trichotillomania is hair loss due to a person pulling, plucking and breaking their own hair.

Medicines

Some medicines can cause or worsen hair loss – ask a pharmacist or doctor for advice.

Medical conditions

Some medical conditions can cause hair loss (e.g., anaemia, thyroid problems, cancer and HIV/AIDS). Stress, anxiety, pregnancy, serious illness and surgery may lead to hair loss a few months after the event.

Poor diet

Poor nutrition, especially iron deficiency, may cause hair loss.

Skin disorders

Some skin disorders cause hair loss (e.g., dermatitis, psoriasis, infection). Tinea (also called ringworm) is a skin fungal infection. Tinea on the scalp causes a red, itchy, scaly patch, with hair loss in and around the patch.

Scarring

Hair does not grow from scar tissue.

Treatment

Unfortunately, there is no permanent cure for male/female pattern baldness or conditions where hair follicles are permanently damaged.

Male/female baldness

Medicines may help and work best if started in the early stages of hair loss. They can slow or stop hair loss and, in some cases, stimulate hair growth. It may be several months before hair regrowth begins and if treatment is

stopped, hair loss will continue as before. Medicines for hair loss include:

- Minoxidil lotion – Minoxidil lotion is available from a pharmacist without a prescription.
- Finasteride tablets – have a hormonal effect that may help some men. Finasteride must be prescribed by a doctor.
- Spironolactone and cyproterone tablets – have a hormonal effect that may help some women. They must be prescribed by a doctor.

Wigs, hair transplants or scalp reduction surgery may be options if medicines do not help.

Other types of hair loss

- In alopecia areata hair may grow back by itself. Some medicines (e.g., corticosteroids, dithranol, minoxidil) may help hair growth.
- Fungal scalp infections can be treated with antifungal medicines.
- Hair loss due to stress, surgery, pregnancy, medicines, medical conditions or poor diet usually stops once the cause is removed.
- Hair lost during cancer treatment usually grows back after treatment is finished.
- Hair transplants and surgery can reduce the size of bald patches.
- Wigs and cosmetic treatments such as hair weaving and tinted sprays can hide hair loss.

Important

Consult a doctor if you notice sudden or patchy hair loss or are losing hair and you:

- are under 18 years old
- have signs of a skin disorder or infection
- have other symptoms of iron deficiency
- feel unwell
- want to try a medical treatment for hair loss.

Self care

Emotional reactions to hair loss are very personal. Some people become very distressed, as hair loss affects their body image and self esteem. Other people are not concerned by hair loss. If you feel distressed, talk to a doctor.

- Remember that treatments for hair loss take time to work.
- Handle your hair gently.
- Remember skin on the scalp is easily sunburned. Always wear a hat when outside, and apply SPF 30+ sunscreen to exposed skin.
- Be careful to protect your scalp as exposed skin on the scalp is easily damaged.
- Learn and practice relaxation techniques.
- Eat regular, healthy meals, including plenty of fruits, vegetables and grain foods. Limit foods high in fat, sugar or salt.

For more information

DermNetNZ

Website: www.dermnetnz.org

Healthdirect Australia

Phone: 1800 022 222

Website: www.healthinsite.gov.au

Consumer Medicine Information (CMI)

Your pharmacist can advise on CMI leaflets.

National Prescribing Service (NPS) Medicines Information

Phone: 1300 MEDICINE (1300 633 424)

Website: www.nps.org.au

The Poisons Information Centre

In case of poisoning phone 13 11 26 from anywhere in Australia.

*Pharmacists are medicines experts.
Ask a pharmacist for advice when
choosing a medicine.*

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