



Annandale OBGYN
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Treating Female Hair loss

Hair loss in women, especially above 40 years old, is often due to a condition called Female Pattern Hair loss (FPHL) and is both inherited and impacted by changes in hormones. Women with FPHL will notice that their hair may seem thinner, their part may appear wider, and they may notice less hair around the temples. With FPHL, you will not lose all your hair but may experience widespread thinning.

How is hair loss treated?

There are a number of ways to treat hair loss and often a combination of treatments will allow for the best results at helping with hair regrowth and preventing further loss.

1) Minoxidil

Minoxidil is an FDA approved over-the-counter topical medication that treats both male and female hair loss. The medication should be spread evenly over the scalp and rubbed in gently, but completely, one to two times daily. Hands should be washed immediately after use. Side effects include skin dryness, scaling, itching and/or redness, as well as hair growing in other places if the medication leaks to other parts of the skin, particularly the forehead and sides of the face. Minoxidil only works while it is being used, so symptoms of thinning and loss will recur if stopping this medication. It takes about 6-12 months to see the full effects. If it works, it will need to be continued indefinitely. It should not be used during pregnancy or breastfeeding.

2) Testosterone

Testosterone compounded creams can help with hair loss if it is caused by *low* testosterone. Low testosterone is seen commonly in women in peri-menopause and menopause. The cream is applied daily to the inner upper arm or forearm and rubbed in completely until dry. Hands should be washed immediately after use. Side effects include gastrointestinal upset, mood changes, acne, increased hair growth elsewhere, change in libido, and itching/discomfort/irritation at the site of application. It takes about 4-8 weeks to start seeing the effects. It should not be used during pregnancy or breastfeeding. It is not FDA-approved to treat hair loss.

You can also work to increase testosterone levels naturally by increasing fatty fish (sardines, salmon), dark and leafy greens (spinach, kale), avocados, eggs, berries and shellfish in your diet, as well as regularly exercising and reducing stress.



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3) Spironolactone

Spironolactone is a prescription medication that can help with hair loss if it is due to *high* testosterone, especially in women with hormonal imbalances like PCOS. It is a pill that is taken once daily and the dosage varies. Some of the side effects include low blood pressure, increased urination, dizziness, lightheadedness, and high potassium levels. Your blood should be tested periodically while taking this medication. It takes at least 6 months to see results. It should not be used during pregnancy or breastfeeding. It is not FDA-approved to treat hair loss.

4) Finasteride

Finasteride is a prescription medication that can help with hair loss if it is due to *high* testosterone, especially in women with hormonal imbalances like PCOS. It is a pill that is taken once daily and the dosage varies. Some of the side effects include dizziness, low libido, breast swelling and tenderness. Finasteride only works while it is being used, so symptoms of thinning and loss will recur if stopping this medication. It takes about 3-6 months to see the full effects. If it works well for you, it will need to be continued indefinitely. It should not be used during pregnancy or breastfeeding. It is not FDA-approved to treat hair loss.

5) Iron

Iron deficiency anemia, especially due to heavy menstrual bleeding, can lead to hair loss. It is recommended to have bloodwork drawn to see if this may be contributing. Hair loss due to anemia is typically reversible. If you are low in iron, it is recommended to take a daily iron supplement with vitamin C for better absorption. VITRON-C is a recommended brand and can be bought over-the-counter. It is also recommended to increase consumption of iron-rich foods, such as red meat, spinach, peas, broccoli, tofu, beans and iron-fortified cereals. We also recommend correcting heavy menstrual bleeding, if you are experiencing that.

It is also recommended to have your thyroid levels checked, as if it is abnormal may contribute to hair thinning.

6) Supplements

Biotin is a common supplement advertised to treat hair thinning and loss. While the data is controversial, many women report improvement in growth while taking biotin. MERIBIN and NATURE'S BOUNTY are recommended brands that can be bought over-the-counter. One 5000mcg pill can be taken daily. Side effects of biotin are rare but include stomach upset, difficulty sleeping and increased thirst. It is not FDA-approved to treat hair loss.



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7) Platelet-Rich Plasma (PRP) Therapy

PRP therapy can be done in the office with an FDA-approved kit. It works by drawing your blood, which is then spun down to separate the whole blood from the platelet-rich plasma. The PRP is then injected directly into the scalp. The platelets stimulate your cells to grow hair by increasing blood supply to the follicle. The therapy is typically done in three consecutive treatments, 4-6 weeks apart then every 6 months for touch-ups. Side effects include pain, infection and scar tissue build-up. The cost is \$600 per session.

8) Lifestyle changes

Living a healthy lifestyle is important for your hair health. It is recommended to eat a healthy, balanced diet and take a daily multivitamin. It is recommended to exercise regularly for 150 minutes per week. If you are drinking heavily, it is recommended to reduce your alcohol consumption. If you are smoking cigarettes, marijuana or vaping, it is recommended to stop doing so. If the water is hard in your home, you can switch your shower head to a filtered shower head that will filter out the harmful minerals and chemicals. You should avoid dying your hair, avoid frequent heat on your hair, avoid brushing wet hair. You should use a sulfate-free shampoo. It is also recommended to reduce stress and get adequate sleep.

What to do about postpartum hair loss?

Postpartum hair loss is very common and typically occurs between 3-9 months after having baby. It happens because during pregnancy you do not have as much hair shedding due to change in hormones, so more of it sheds at once in the postpartum period. While it is worrisome to many, it is normal and resolves with time. You should treat anemia with iron supplementation if you are anemic after delivery. You should use sulfate-free shampoos that are volumizing, as well as light-weight conditioners. Avoid tight hairstyles and brushing hair while wet. You should also continue taking your prenatal vitamin.