

# The Loss and Short of it

*It can be very confusing wading through the competing claims of various companies and technologies relating to hair loss. Russell Knudsen of Knudsen clinic puts forward the facts on treating clients with hair loss.*

**U**nfortunately, it's a marketplace dominated by advertising rather than science. The cause of male pattern hair loss, by far the commonest form of hair loss in men, is well understood by medical scientists and incidentally treatment options have improved significantly in recent years. In women the commonest form of hair loss, female pattern thinning, is also influenced by hormones and better treatment options are now available.

## THE MYTHS

Let's start with the myths: poor scalp hygiene, poor diet and tight hats, among many other causes, have been variously blamed for hair loss. Even though this is complete nonsense and has been proved wrong for many years, many companies and websites still promote 'remedies' based on 'correcting' these problems. These range from vitamins, e.g. Biotin (Vitamin H), to Silica, Zinc and herbal remedies such as Saw Palmetto and Ginseng. Ordinary shampoos and conditioners do not have any effect

upon the ability of the hair to grow so 'scalp cleansers' are an expensive option with limited efficacy. Some special shampoos are designed for people with thinning hair but mostly seem to provide cosmetic benefits only by coating the hair shaft. This gives the illusion of thicker hair.

**THE FACTS**

Male pattern hair loss (balding) is a genetic condition, inherited from either side of the family (mothers or fathers, often both sides) that begins to be observed after puberty because of the influence of adult levels of certain male sex hormones. Female pattern thinning also begins some time after puberty and may also be influenced by certain male hormones.

Curiously hair thinning is primarily restricted to the upper scalp in both men and women. This appears to be a result of different hormone levels inside these hair follicles. These hormones initiate a process of shrinking of the hair follicles in the scalp until, eventually, most are lost. The crucial factor in the successful management of male and female pattern hair loss is early medical treatment. This is best achieved with prescription medicines. These medications are much more effective in stopping, or slowing down hair loss than they are in re-growing hair. Some patients with early thinning can successfully regrow stronger hairs but this occurs in only approximately one third of these patients. By way of contrast, over 80 per cent of patients who regularly use the medication will stop further hair thinning.

If you use prescription medicine (any doctor can write the script) as your base medication, you can choose to add other treatment options if you desire. The next most successful is minoxidil lotion (available from the chemist) which is a hair stimulant that can strengthen existing hair and slow down future loss. It is, however, not very effective if used alone. Although low power laser therapy has gained a lot of publicity, and is a proven mild stimulant for hair, the evidence for its continuing effectiveness in balding and thinning is lacking. It should not be used as a stand-alone therapy as it has not shown any significant effectiveness if used alone. I have significant doubts about the effectiveness of hand-held laser devices because I don't believe that most users will apply the laser for long enough on the hairs to get any significant effect. A cap version of the laser that can be used at home (Lasercap) may provide better effectiveness and is now available.

**THE SOLUTION**

Given that I have described the principle benefit of medication as slowing or stopping hair loss, then what can we do for the man with balding or woman with thinning who wants some hair back? The simple answer is that to regain significant healthy hairs in the upper scalp, the only solution is a hair transplant. Modern hair transplantation involves the transfer of tiny grafts containing 1-3 hairs (follicular unit grafts) from the healthy lower scalp to the balding area. As these hairs are coded to be 'non-balding' they survive in the bald areas and continue to grow healthy hairs. The use of natural hair groupings ensures that a properly designed and properly executed hair transplant is undetectable. The unnatural appearance of older style plug transplants is a thing of the past and they haven't been performed for at least 20 years.

The great advantage of hair transplantation is that you have your own healthy hairs (from the back of the scalp) growing in the previously thin area. They can be coloured, permed, straightened and styled without affecting the ability of the hair to grow. The constant comments I get from men and women who undergo hair transplants is that they achieve more self-confidence and that even their hairdresser doesn't know! Modern techniques also allow men to wear a shorter hair style without any evidence of the surgery. It is also important to note that almost all of my hair transplant patients continue to use medication to prevent future hair loss. This reduces the possibility that they might need further hair transplants in the future.

Russell Knudsen M.B., B. S., FFMACCS **IN**



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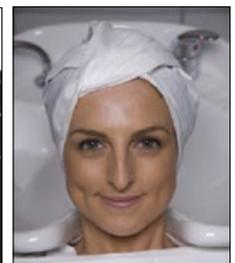
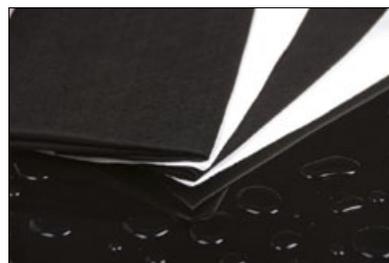
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