

Does It Work?

Hair-Loss Treatments

BY STEPHANIE ANDERSON WITMER

We're not surprised when men start to go bald, but hair loss can happen to women too. In fact, of the roughly 80 million U.S. adults with the most common type, androgenetic alopecia (also known as male or female pattern baldness), about 40% are women. Hair loss can deal a big blow to self-esteem, and while genetics plays a role—if one of your parents lost his or her hair, the chances are higher that you will too—hair loss can also signal a health issue, such as an autoimmune disorder or a thyroid condition. Most commonly, stress, hormonal shifts, dandruff, medications, or vitamin deficiencies can also trigger hair loss.

That's why if you notice falling strands, your first step should be to see a dermatologist to diagnose the, well, root cause. "You have to fix the underlying medical problem before you're going to see any

improvements," says Elizabeth Bahar Houshmand, M.D., a dermatologist based in Dallas. Once you know why you're shedding, you will be able to figure out how to treat it.

But before we get to what works, it's helpful to understand the hair growth cycle: We're born with all the follicles we'll ever have—roughly 5 million on the scalp—but every one doesn't sprout a hair at the same time. There are three main stages to hair growth: the anagen (or growing) phase; the catagen (or transition) phase, in which new growth stops; and the telogen (or resting) phase, when "old" hair is shed and the cycle starts again. When something throws off this natural cycle—as can any one of those health conditions—your hair may begin falling out.

We went ahead and teased out which remedies are worth a try depending on what's causing your issue. Check out what our experts had to say.



KATIE THOMPSON/THE LICENSING PROJECT.

TOPICAL PRODUCTS

WHAT THEY ARE: Foams and liquids containing minoxidil, the active ingredient in Rogaine, claim to revive follicles to stimulate growth. (Latisse, for eyelashes, contains a different active ingredient.) For thinning due to dandruff, ingredients in certain

anti-dandruff shampoos and conditioners are purported to calm scalp inflammation, allowing hair to grow.

WHAT WE KNOW: When used once or twice a day, minoxidil is scientifically proven to work in 80% of women by both strengthening hair follicles and extending the growth phase of the

hair cycle so more strands appear on the head, says Shilpi Khetarpal, M.D., a dermatologist at Cleveland Clinic. When used two to three times a week, anti-dandruff shampoos with zinc pyrithione may help those whose hair loss is caused by dandruff or an overgrowth of yeast on the scalp, likely because this ingredient's antimicrobial and anti-inflammatory properties fight yeast, quell inflammation, and stimulate hair growth, says Dr. Khetarpal.

SHOULD YOU TRY THEM? Yes, these shampoos and conditioners are effective if dandruff or yeast is causing your hair loss. Minoxidil can work for many people with female pattern baldness, with the following caveat: If you stop using it, hair loss starts again. When hair loss is a symptom of an autoimmune disorder or a thyroid disorder, get treatment for that before using regrowth products, since hair often grows back on its own once the underlying condition is under control. If you're losing your hair because of something like stress or a vitamin deficiency, lifestyle changes can help hair grow back on its own.

BRANDS: Rogaine (\$49 for a two-month supply of women's foam); generic minoxidil (\$36 for a 12-month supply of women's foam); Head & Shoulders shampoo (contains zinc pyrithione; \$6 to \$10).

SUPPLEMENTS

WHAT THEY ARE: Hair growth supplement makers say that natural ingredients such as biotin, other B vitamins, and zinc will help new strands grow in thicker and stronger.

WHAT WE KNOW: Biotin is a B vitamin thought to improve the structure of a protein that's abundant in hair, but research is lacking on the efficacy of its supplement form. In general, getting your vitamins and minerals through whole foods is recommended, since it's thought that the variety of nutrients all work together to provide the benefits your body needs.

SHOULD YOU TRY THEM? Maybe, but ask your doctor to recommend a reputable brand, as supplements aren't evaluated by the FDA, meaning there's a risk of cross-contamination or mislabeling.

BRANDS: Vitafusion Gorgeous Hair, Skin & Nails gummy vitamins (\$12); Viviscal and Viviscal Pro supplements (\$50 to \$60 for 60 tablets).

IN-OFFICE TREATMENTS

WHAT THEY ARE: Administered by a dermatologist, platelet-rich plasma (PRP) injections are said to use your blood plasma to stimulate hair growth in thinning areas on the scalp or brows.

WHAT WE KNOW: Studies show that PRP treatments do increase hair growth. A doctor draws your blood and isolates the plasma, then injects it where needed; it promotes cell growth and blood vessel repair and prolongs the growing phase of your natural hair cycle.

SHOULD YOU TRY THEM? Sure—the injections are safe. But you'll need to consult with a dermatologist to ensure that you're a candidate; also, they are pricey and typically require multiple sessions. People with underlying medical conditions like

autoimmune or thyroid disorders may not benefit because they'll simply lose the new hair, and blood-thinning medications may cause the treatment to be less effective or increase the risk of bruising.

WHERE TO FIND THEM:

Search for a local board-certified dermatologist and schedule a consultation; ask about his or her experience performing PRP injections and to view before-and-after photos of patients. The website of the American Society for Dermatologic Surgery (asds.net) has a "Find a Dermatologic Surgeon" resource that lists doctors credentialed to perform dermatologic procedures. Expect to pay \$600 to \$1,200 per session.

LIGHT THERAPY

WHAT IT IS: Combs, helmets, and headbands use low-level laser light therapy or LED light to prompt new hair

growth in people with androgenetic alopecia. **WHAT WE KNOW:** Research is promising: Laser and LED light appear to decrease scalp inflammation and stimulate hair follicles to elicit fresh growth. "We know that the number of follicles increases with continued use, and strands get stronger," Dr. Khetarpal says.

SHOULD YOU TRY IT?

Yes. "It's very safe and very effective," says Dr. Khetarpal, and aside from headache in some people, side effects are minimal. But the devices aren't cheap.

BRANDS: Look for products with FDA approval, like iGrow helmet (\$399), HairMax LaserComb (\$299 to \$399), and HairMax LaserBand (\$549 to \$799).

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