



Hair Loss in Women

Hair loss in women can be caused by a lot of reasons. **MH** finds out what they are.

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Female pattern baldness is as common as male pattern baldness. Other than genetic, there are other causes for hair loss in women.

Hair Loss—Why it Happens?

There are several causes of hair loss in women, explains Dr Rachael Teo, specialist in dermatology and consultant, Raffles Skin & Aesthetics. One of the most common causes is female pattern hair loss due to androgenetic alopecia (AGA). This type of hair loss may occur any time after puberty and has a strong genetic predisposition. Other causes of hair loss in women include telogen effluvium (e.g. after pregnancy or illness), hair shedding due to iron deficiency/ thyroid hormone imbalances, and patchy hair loss due to alopecia areata (an autoimmune disease).

While both men and women experience AGA, says Dr Teo, the pattern of hair loss is slightly different. Men tend to start with a receding hairline followed by hair loss at the top of the head; women tend to lose hair at the vertex first and may notice their hair part looks widened in the initial stages of AGA.

Hair loss due to iron deficiency or post pregnancy telogen effluvium is seen more commonly in women.

Medications and Hair Loss

Can medications cause hair loss in women? Yes, explains Dr Tan Siew Kiang, specialist in dermatology and

consultant, Raffles Skin & Aesthetics. Many commonly prescribed medications can cause temporary hair loss, trigger the onset of female pattern baldness and even cause permanent hair loss. These medications include oral contraceptive pills, isotretinoin (vitamin A derived medicine to treat acne), anticonvulsants, anti-depressions, weight loss pills containing amphetamines, nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, steroids and much more. And the list has not included those used in chemotherapy and radiation for cancer treatment.

Hair Transplants

Women can receive hair transplants but only 2 to 5 per cent of women are suitable candidates for hair transplant surgery. According to Dr Tan, this is because most women have what's called diffuse hair loss, which means overall thinning in all areas of the head, including the sides and back that are usually harvested as donor sites. In female pattern baldness, these donor areas are also unstable. They thin just like the other areas of the head. If these strands of hair and accompanying follicles are removed

from these donor areas in women and transplanted them to other areas, it's just going to fall out. Thus the outcome is not as long lasting as in men.

Women and Pattern Baldness

Heredity plays a major factor in this type of baldness, says Dr Tan. These patients inherit hair follicles with a genetic sensitivity to a male hormone called dihydrotestosterone (DHT). DHT shrinks and miniaturizes the hair follicles, causing shortening of their lifespan. A tiny level of testosterone is present in all females. When female hormone (oestrogen) drops with taking contraceptive pills or menopause, DHT becomes relatively higher and starts causing hair loss, explains Dr Tan.

Stop Losing Your Locks

The commonest cause for hair fall in women is the overuse of chemicals on the hair from colouring, straightening or perming, which can damage the hair. One should not colour or perm their hair too frequently, advises Dr Tan. Wearing hair in a tight ponytail on a repeated basis or wearing heavy braids, weaves, or extensions also can cause profuse hair loss, especially along the front hairline. Shifting the parting line by 1cm monthly can also reduce the chance of thinning over the parting line. Telogen effluvium is hair shedding six weeks to three months after stressful events like childbirth, severe infection, major surgery, extreme dieting or extreme stress. Iron deficiency in vegetarians is another common cause for women's hair loss. If you suspect your hair loss may be due to nutritional or health-related issues, it is essential you see your physician to get a blood test done for proper diagnosis and treatment, says Dr Tan. ■