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Hair Loss (Alopecia)

There are a number of causes of hair loss and some causes are treatable

Hair Care Injury - Chemical treatments including dyes, bleaches, straighteners and permanents can damage hair causing it to break off. Hairstyles like ponytails and braids that pull tightly on the hair can cause loss, especially along the sides of the scalp. Combing and brushing too vigorously or pulling on snarls can also damage hair. Using a cream rinse or conditioner after shampooing will make hair easier to comb.

Hair Pulling (Trichotillomania) - Children and sometimes adults will twist or pull their hair, brows or lashes until they fall out. This usually improves when the harmful effects of hair pulling are explained. Sometimes hair pulling can be a coping response to unpleasant stresses and may need professional counseling.

Hereditary Hair Loss - The tendency to lose hair can be inherited from either the mother's or father's side of the family. Women with this trait develop thinning hair, but do not become completely bald. This can start in the teens, twenties or thirties. Although there is no cure for this condition, some patients note improvement and (or) prevention of further hair loss with twice daily applications of minoxidil (Rogaine) solution to their scalp. Some men also note similar benefits with finasteride (Propecia), a pill that blocks the formation of a male hormone that contributes to hair loss. This medication is not approved for use in women. Hair transplantation can be considered in people with permanent hair loss. This involves moving hair from one part of the scalp (where there is hair, usually from the back side of the scalp) to bald or thinning spots.

Alopecia Areata - In this type of hair loss, hair falls out in patches, resulting in smooth, round or oval patches of varying sizes. It rarely results in complete loss of scalp and body hair. This disease may affect children or adults. In most cases, the hair eventually regrows. Treatment includes applications of creams or ointments, injections or in rare cases, special light treatments or pills.

Childbirth - Within two to three months after childbirth, some women will notice large amounts of hair falling out. This can last one to six months but for most women, the hair soon regrows.

Illness - One to three months after a high fever, severe illness or infection, a person may note that their hair is falling out. Within a few months, the hair usually starts to regrow. **Major Surgery/Chronic Illness** - Anyone who has a major operation may notice increased hair shedding within one to three months afterwards. The condition reverses itself within a few months but people who have a severe chronic illness may shed hair indefinitely.

Thyroid Disease - Both an over- and underactive thyroid can cause hair loss. A blood test can check to see if a person has thyroid disease. Hair loss will improve with treatment of the thyroid disease. **Fungus Infection of the Scalp** - This infection is most common in children and typically begins with small patches of scaling that can spread and result in broken hair, redness, swelling and even oozing. This condition is diagnosed with lab tests and treated with antifungal medications.

Medications - A large number of medications have been associated with hair loss. High doses of vitamin A may also cause hair loss. Patients who experience hair loss should have their doctor check to see if any of their medications might be responsible for their hair loss. **Birth Control Pills** - Women who lose hair while taking birth control pills often have an inherited tendency for hair thinning. When this occurs a woman should ask her gynecologist about switching to another birth control pill or a different form of birth control. A woman who stops using oral contraceptives may notice that her hair begins shedding two or three months later. This may continue for six months when it usually stops. **Cancer Treatments** - Some cancer treatments cause temporary hair loss that can be extensive. This usually occurs one to three weeks after the treatment and regrows several months after the treatment has stopped.

Diet - Some people who go on crash diets, particularly those low in protein, can experience sudden hair loss. This condition can be reversed and prevented by eating a well balanced diet that includes adequate protein. **Low Serum Iron** - Iron deficiency occasionally produces hair loss. Some people don't have enough iron in their diets or may not fully absorb iron. Women who have heavy menstrual periods may develop iron deficiency. Low iron can be detected by laboratory tests and can be corrected by taking iron pills.

