

Early intervention is the key to preventing hair loss

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For FLORIDA TODAY

If your once lustrous locks now look limp and are diminishing in numbers, take comfort in the fact that you are not alone.

For about 80 percent of men and 50 percent of women, hair loss is part of life. Blame genetics, hormones, medications, hair dye overuse, diet or stress. Call it androgenetic alopecia, also known as male or female pattern balding, but thinning and disappearing hair is a reality for many.

It often starts without much pomp and circumstance. A few more hairs than usual in the bathtub. On closer examination, they appear thinner than you remember.

“Hair loss is generally a gradual process, and most people will lose about 50 to 75 percent of their hair before they realize they are going bald,” said Dr. Emran Imami of Imami Hair Restoration in Melbourne. “During this time, the hair follicles are shrinking or miniaturizing, and over time the hair follicle permanently shuts down.”

By the time hair loss is noticeable, it’s time to act. Once hair is gone, it’s gone for good.

“Early intervention is key to preventing hair loss amongst both men and women,” Imami said. “Early intervention with aggressive medical and regenerative treatments can reverse miniaturization and promote hair preservation. Once the hair follicle shrinks and shuts down, it no longer will grow hair.”

Choosing to do nothing accepts baldness and opts for hats, wigs, hair powder, or scalp micropigmentation, or SMP, which involves artistic tattooing of the scalp to fool the eye into thinking it is actual hair.

Ultimately, an individual can just embrace a bald pate, perhaps to the point of shaving the remaining strands. According to a University of Pennsylvania study, a shaved head on men can signal dominance, even over a full head of the stuff, so that’s something to consider.

Instead of doing nothing, Aubrey Blaire opted to take action.

“I don’t want to look my age,” said the Merritt Island resident.

Blaire, who suffers from androgenetic alopecia, first noticed her hair was thinning as far back as her twenties.

“I had hair but it was getting noticeably thinner,” she said.

She fought back, first with Minoxidil at a time when the medication was first gaining traction for hair loss, and later progressing to protein rich platelet (PRP) and PDO (polydioxonone) threads.

PRP separates a patient’s own blood platelets through a centrifuge and injects these into balding spots. The theory is that the superabundant growth factors inherent in these platelets will nurture hair follicles back to their origi-



Hair loss is a reality for many, but there are treatments available. GETTY IMAGES

nal abundance. PDO threads, commonly used in cosmetic procedures, encourage cell division, kickstarting dormant follicles to again produce hair.

For some time, Blaire was content with PRP/PDO, further enhanced by ancillary treatment such as biotin supplements, which has been suggested can help restore hair growth in people with a biotin deficiency.

Eventually, however, she felt her hair was again in a slump. She decided it was time for the big guns, a hair transplant, still top of the line option in the approximately \$4 billion hair loss treatment industry.

“Hair transplantation remains the gold standard for hair restoration,” Imami said.

The procedure has changed significantly since it was first introduced in the 1930s to help burn victims.

“The technique has greatly improved to where now we can transfer individual hair follicles for an artistic, natural result,” Imami said. “By transplanting single hair follicles, the results are more natural and very effective.”

The procedure, performed outpatient, is much quicker than years ago. Pre-treatment with PRP, exosomes and other medications help optimize outcomes. Exosomes, or stem cell building blocks, have gained interest because of their ability to carry signals that initiate cell regeneration.

Donor hair is harvested from the

back of the head, where hair tends to grow thicker, but for men it can also be harvested from beard hair. Imami uses NeoGraft to precisely extract hair follicles with a 99 percent success rate.

NeoGraft, the next generation from follicular unit excision techniques, safely harvests individual hair follicles and transplants them. Because it is semi-automated, it removes a large portion of possible human error. Hair follicles are removed with a wand that extracts them with suction. Another tool makes the incision and implants the follicles simultaneously. Since it is minimally invasive, complications and scarring are reduced.

Blaire breezed through the procedure. “It was like sleeping on a massage chair,” she said.

She did admit that things initially seemed worse before getting better. She experienced some initial hair loss as her scalp adjusted to the treatment and there was minimal swelling. But after a day off, Blaire was back to work, and not much later, was off on vacation. She did not tell family members about the transplant, and no one at work or at home seemed to notice or question her about it.

As the new hair began to grow, her head experienced a transformation. Her hair seemed thicker, because it was indeed thicker.

“It’s a dramatic change,” she said. “It feels much fuller, but in a very natural

way. I’ve had several people tell me they love what I’ve done with my hair.”

Because transplants are permanent, Blaire does not expect to need to repeat it, particularly since she is also stacking things in her favor by continuing with PRP treatments and using over-the-counter hair loss prevention aids such as those recommended by Dr. Imami, products such as organic shampoos and supplements rich in vitamins A to E, iron and trace minerals, as well as Minoxidil, Finasteride or Aldactone, all FDA-approved medications. Low light laser caps, which look like a baseball cap and are worn for a set amount of time daily, can also prove beneficial.

Imami notes that more and more women, like Blaire, are opting for transplants.

“Ten years ago, since there were few medical options to treat thinning hair, I could only offer patients hair transplantation,” he said. “Ninety-five percent of my patients then were men with severe hair loss or balding and five percent were women seeking the same treatment. With the recent development of new and effective regenerative medical therapies for hair loss, now 50 percent of my patients are women. Not only has there been a shift in the percentage of women in my practice, but both women and men are addressing their thinning hair or hair loss at a much earlier age.”

For more information, visit imami-hair.com or call 321-312-4168.