

Is Hair Loss Inevitable?

One of the most common questions women ask London Drugs pharmacists is, "What can I do to stop my hair falling out?" Here, we address hair loss in women and how to keep your "crowning glory," whatever your age.

For many women, finding a surplus of hair on their hair brush is more than a cosmetic issue. It's an emotional one as well. In fact, more women fear thinning hair as a sign of aging, than women who fear wrinkles.

Hair loss is not always associated with the passing of years. Many women maintain a thick head of hair throughout their lives. Much of the hair loss experienced by women is due to hormonal influences, which can affect the hair's growing cycle at any age. Fluctuations in hormone levels—such as those experienced following the birth of a baby—can result in significant hair loss.

HAIR GROWTH AND LOSS

All hair goes through a growth cycle. This can last anywhere from two to six years. Close to 90 percent of the hair on a person's scalp is growing at any one time, and the remaining 10 percent is in a resting phase. This phase lasts two to three months, after which a new hair pushes the resting hair out.

Most hair shedding is due to the natural growth cycle and is nothing to be concerned about. Losing between 50 and 100 hairs a day is perfectly normal.

As we grow older, hair growth begins to slow down. The follicles begin to produce hairs that are thinner and weaker, and eventually produce only fine, downlike hairs.

Hereditary thinning or balding (*androgenetic alopecia*) is the most common cause of hair loss. This trait

may be passed down from either the mother's or father's side of the family. Women who have inherited this tendency develop thinning hair, but do not become completely bald in the way that men do. Rather, they experience moderate hair loss all over the scalp. The condition is not always associated with aging and may start in the teens, twenties, or thirties.

HORMONAL INFLUENCES

Hormonal problems are a common cause of hair loss. If your thyroid gland is overactive or underactive, you may experience excessive shedding. Since thyroid activity can slow down at menopause, many women experience hair loss at this time. This type of hair loss can usually be helped by treating the thyroid problem. Hair loss may also be caused by the imbalance of hormones associated with menopause. Many women have reported that, once the imbalance has been corrected, their hair grows thicker again. (See pages 10-11 *Making Sense of Your Hormones*.)

A number of women notice hair loss three months or so after giving birth. This loss is also related to hormones. During pregnancy, high hormone levels result in the body retaining hair that would normally fall out. When the hormones return to pre-pregnancy levels, the retained hair sheds and the normal cycle of growth and loss resumes.



TREATING HAIR LOSS WITH MINOXIDIL

Minoxidil (available in Canada without a prescription as *Rogaine*[®], or as **London Drugs** Hair Regrowth Treatment), is a topical treatment for hair loss.

A two percent solution of minoxidil is applied to the scalp twice a day. The treatment works by stimulating the hair follicles that have been adversely affected by hormonal activity and/or heredity. In effect, the actual growth cycle is prolonged, allowing more hairs to be in the growth phase at one time.

While family doctors and dermatologists frequently prescribe topical minoxidil for women experiencing hair loss, Canadian health authorities have not yet approved use of the identical *non-prescription* product by women. (Non-prescription minoxidil for women has been approved in the United States and other countries.)

Studies show that close to half the women who have used minoxidil experience a slow-down of hair loss. Results are not apparent until three to four months have passed and, once the new hair growth has come in, the treatment must be continued in order to sustain it.

If you have any questions about minoxidil and how you might benefit from its use, please consult your doctor, dermatologist, or **London Drugs** pharmacist.

Your **LONDON DRUGS** Pharmacist Says:

If you are experiencing sudden hair loss, you should check with your family doctor as this may be a sign of a health condition that needs medical attention.

You should not use minoxidil topical hair regrowth treatment if you are pregnant or nursing, or under 18 years of age. It is also important that the solution not be applied to a sunburned scalp, or if you have scalp irritation or broken skin.

In rare instances, minoxidil may cause rapid heart beat or chest pain. If you experience these symptoms, you should stop using the product and call your doctor for advice.



Nature's Solution to Thinning Hair?

The rooibos tea plant (*Aspalathus linearis*) grows only in the Cederberg mountains North of Cape Town in South Africa. In recent times, the plant has been recognized for its exceptional antioxidant properties. Rooibos (pronounced "roy-boss") contains 37 antioxidant substances, and is also rich in minerals such as calcium and potassium.

Due to its potential health benefits, rooibos (or "red bush") tea has become popular throughout the world.

Not so well-known is this plant's promising effects when applied topically to the skin and hair.

In a study commissioned by a processor of rooibos for use in cosmetic applications, and carried out by an independent laboratory in France, rooibos was perceived to positively affect the hair and hair growth.ⁱ

In a 90-day trial, the action of a lotion containing a broad-spectrum rooibos extract was compared with a placebo lotion without rooibos. The trial participants were healthy men and women experiencing hair loss.

At trial-end, using a videotrichogramme that measures hair density and hair growth speed, the laboratory noted that a significant increase in the speed of hair growth had occurred in the participants using the rooibos lotion. The participants were next asked to fill in a questionnaire. When the results were tallied, 67 percent rated their hair loss as zero or low, 78 percent saw a low to medium improvement, 45 percent saw a low to medium regrowth of hair, and 63 percent considered their hair had become smoother and more shiny.

While this study is not a clinical trial, it nevertheless adds weight to anecdotal evidence that rooibos may help reduce hair loss, increase growth and improve the general texture and appearance of the hair.

i. 1998 study in vivo on human subjects on the efficacy of an active (sic) designed to prevent hair loss plus placebo:videotrichogramme study conducted on a lotion containing MPE Rooibos by Dermascan, France for Cosmetochem International.

STRANGE HAIR FACTS

- ☆ Every day, the average scalp produces 35 meters of hair (115 feet). In a year, that's almost 12.75 kilometers, or close to 8 miles.
- ☆ According to The Guinness website, the current record for long hair, set in 1997, is held by Hoo Sateow of Thailand, at just over 5 meters (6 foot, 11 inches).

Introducing

A New Line of Hair Care Products for naturally thick and healthy hair

The healthful effect of certain plants and herbs on the hair became the inspiration for a South African pharmacist to develop a line of products for sparse and thinning hair. These products have been recently reformulated to incorporate new developments in hair-care science, and are now available at **London Drugs**.



The concept for *Herbs Help Hair Grow* formulations developed when pharmacist Lou Segal noticed that a specific tribe in his native South Africa continued to have exceptionally young skin and luxuriant hair well into old age. Curiously, neighbouring tribes did not exhibit these characteristics. After investigating the tribe's customs and rituals, Mr. Segal

noticed that they routinely packed a mixture of plants, roots and leaves on their hair and faces, in their desire to cleanse their bodies and ward off evil spirits. He took a sample of this mixture to his laboratory and, following identification of its contents, incorporated it into his line of hair care products. One of the primary herbs in the tribe's organic mixture was the rooibos plant (see sidebar to left).

OTHER BENEFICIAL INGREDIENTS

Products in the *Herbs Help Hair Grow* program include shampoo, conditioner and a hair-reviving formula that is applied to the hair daily. Beneficial ingredients in addition to rooibos include:

HORSETAIL EXTRACT The horsetail plant (*Equisetum arvense*) is a rich source of silica—a mineral known for its positive effects on the hair and skin.

SAW PALMETTO Researchers believe that one of the primary contributors to hair loss is a hormone known as DHT (dihydrotestosterone), which is synthesized from testosterone. (Since men have more testosterone than women, this factor alone may be responsible for a significant degree of hair loss in men.) Saw palmetto inhibits this enzyme.ⁱⁱ

Stinging nettle and pygeum plant extracts also help stimulate hair growth.

B-VITAMINS B-vitamins such as inositol, niacin and biotin are recognized for their salutary effects on the hair follicles and hair. Panthenol (vitamin B5) has the ability to thicken and repair damaged hair, increasing pliability and lustre.

ANTIOXIDANTS Powerful antioxidants such as alpha lipoic acid, coenzyme Q-10 (CoQ10), and green tea help keep the cells of the hair follicles healthy.

SCALP HEALTH ENHANCERS

Dandruff and excess grease (sebum) can irritate and/or block the hair follicle, ultimately impacting the appearance of the hair. Polysorbate-80 in *Herbs Help Hair Grow* shampoo helps control dandruff and oiliness. Cayenne pepper (capsicum) helps stimulate circulation in the scalp.

ii. Marks, L.S., Tyler, V.E. *Saw palmetto extract: newest (and oldest) treatment alternative for men with symptomatic benign prostatic hyperplasia.* Urology. 1999;53:457-461.

