



Misconception numero uno: hair loss is not just a man's problem! (Photo by Getty Images)

By Rachel Swalin, Health.com

If you start seeing globs of hair in the shower drain, it's easy to get freaked out. After all, hair can be an important part of a woman's identity, and hair loss is typically seen as a man's problem. The truth is, women make up about 40% of the Americans suffering from unwanted shedding, and 50% of all women experience female pattern hair loss (yes, that exists) by age 50.

So it's a big myth that hair loss is a man's problem. Read on for 10 more truths about your tresses.

www.phyto-usa.com/needs/hair-disorders/hair-loss.html

Women lose their hair the same way men do

With male pattern baldness, hairlines form an M shape as the hair recedes, and many men go on to lose all the hair on the tops of their heads, says Mary Gail Mercurio, MD, associate professor of dermatology at the University of Rochester

Medical Center in Rochester, New York. Women, however, typically do not have receding hairlines. "They get diffuse thinning right on top of their heads," says Dr. Mercurio. Clumps of hair coming out in the shower or while you're styling your hair shouldn't be cause for concern. Decreased density on top of your head or even a widening part are more common signs of hair loss in women. Female pattern hair loss is usually inherited from family members, but it's also sparked by hormone changes or everyday aging.

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High testosterone makes hair fall out

Excess testosterone does not cause either sex to go bald—but testosterone does play a big role. The body converts testosterone into dihydrotestosterone (DHT), and this process causes damage to the hair follicle, explains Dr. Mercurio. So those who convert testosterone to DHT most efficiently lose more hair than those whose bodies are less efficient. In that case, your doctor might prescribe an anti-androgen medication to block the effect the hormones have on the hair follicle, says Melissa Piliang, MD, a dermatologist at the Cleveland Clinic in Ohio.

Birth control pills cause hair loss

"A number of androgen (male) hormones can interact with the hair follicle to make it thinner and finer," Dr. Piliang says. Some types of progesterone, a hormone commonly found in oral contraceptives, can act like androgens, Dr. Piliang says. Hair loss with the pill is more a problem, though, if you're using an older version of birth control. "The newer ones developed have fewer of those side effects and are really more anti-androgen," Dr. Piliang says. In fact, some doctors may prescribe birth control to help fight unwanted hair loss, Dr. Piliang says. Talk to your doctor to find the right version for you, especially if you have a family history of hair loss.

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All hair loss is permanent

Some instances of shedding could just be temporary. Many women lose some hair

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after giving birth, for instance, as their hormones adjust back to their pre-pregnancy levels, Dr. Piliang says, but it regrows within several months. Many women also have diet issues that affect their hair. “Women more often than men have nutritional deficiencies in iron and zinc,” Dr. Piliang says. Both are key nutrients for strong hair, so low levels could weaken your strands. You can fix that by increasing your intake of foods rich in those nutrients, like beans and oysters. You could also take supplements, but check with your doctor first to be safe. Best to avoid extreme eating plans too. Any restrictive diet can lead to hair shedding because you’re losing out on essential nutrients, Dr. Piliang says.

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Stress makes your hair fall out

It’s easy to blame thinning strands on stress, but for stress to cause hair loss, it has to be more extreme than what you experience when you’re prepping for a big presentation at work or in an argument with your spouse. When your body experiences something traumatic, like a major surgery or illness, it can disrupt the cycle of hair, shifting it prematurely into the shedding phase, Dr. Mercurio says. It’s a condition called telogen effluvium, which can also be caused by childbirth, according to the American Hair Loss Association. Shedding usually subsides once the stressful event has passed. While some experts believe emotional stress such as the death of a loved one can cause hair loss, nothing has been proven definitively, Dr. Mercurio says.

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Only older women lose their hair

It’s possible for some women, especially those with a family history of hair loss, to see thinning start in their 20s or even earlier. “Female hair loss can start in the teens and gradually progress with age,” Dr. Mercurio says. Hormone problems are one thing that could affect hair at a young age. “Women can get an imbalance of the male hormones that trigger hair shedding,” Dr. Piliang says. The condition is called polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) and can also cause irregular periods, excess body and facial hair, and increased acne. Hormones aren’t the only culprit

for early hair loss. “The things that I look for in young women are nutritional deficiencies, eating disorders, or really high stress,” Dr. Piliang says.

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Biotin can cure hair loss

At the drugstore, you're sure to find supplements that claim to boost your hair and nails. Most of them contain biotin, which makes up the group of B complex vitamins. They play an essential part in maintaining healthy hair by helping with metabolism and converting food for energy production. While a biotin deficiency can trigger hair loss, a lack of it is pretty rare, according to the Mayo Clinic. “Biotin is only worth taking if you're having hair breakage problems,” Dr. Mercurio says. Though it might help strengthen your hair, there's not strong evidence it can do much for hair loss caused by hormone problems or genetics. In that case, you'll likely need a stronger treatment from your doctor.

Shampooing too much will make you lose your hair

You might have heard of the “no-poo” movement sparked by celebrities and bloggers. The claim: Your hair will get prettier, healthier, and thicker by skipping shampoo. “Patients tend to notice shedding most in the shower,” Dr. Piliang says. “So they associate shedding with shampooing.” There's no scientific evidence, though, that ties hair loss to the number of times you shampoo during the week. In fact, shampooing less can actually be bad for your hair. “Shampoo cleans off oils on the scalp that can contain hormones that drive hair loss,” Dr. Piliang says. Not shampooing enough can also lead to dandruff, which can inhibit hair growth. Make sure to wash your hair regularly and keep in mind it's normal to shed 100 to 150 hairs a day, Dr. Piliang says.

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Too much sun can make thinning hair worse

Sure, being out in the sun without sunscreen on your scalp is sure to bring on a burn, but it won't cause hair loss. In fact, vitamin D, a key nutrient you get from the sun and food, can be crucial for your locks. “Vitamin D is very important for hair cycling,” Dr. Piliang says. “It helps push hair from its resting phase to the growing phase.” It might also play a role in hair loss. A study in *Skin Pharmacology and*

Physiology found that women with female pattern hair loss had significantly lower vitamin D levels than those without the condition. The National Health Institutes recommends that adults get 600 IU of vitamin D daily. If you're not getting enough from the sun, try adding foods rich in vitamin D to your diet.

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Coloring your hair can make it fall out

Dyeing your hair won't make you go bald, but bad styling practices can weaken your strands. "Any treatment done too much can make hair break more easily," Dr. Mercurio says. That includes bleaching or coloring hair, overusing hot irons and dryers, as well as using chemical straighteners. Putting any kind of tension on the hair, with tight braids or extensions for example, also damages the hair over time. "When hair is under extreme tension for long periods, it weakens and the growing part of the hair gets damaged," Dr. Piliang says. If you notice breakage, it's a good idea to start treating your hair more gently and use protectants each time you apply heat.