

The growth cycle of hair

Hair grows in a repeating three-phase cycle. On the scalp, the *growing phase* of hair can last anywhere from two to five years and, at any one time, about 87% of the hair on your scalp is in this phase. The second phase is a short two-week *transition period* involving around 1% of the hair on your scalp. The *resting phase* ends hair growth and typically lasts three months. At any one time, less than 12% of hair is in the resting phase.

On average, hair grows about 0.35 millimeters a day. Since hairs on the scalp are at different stages of the growth cycle at any one time, it is normal to lose hair every day. In fact, we typically shed approximately 100 hairs a day as the cycle takes its course. Normally, a hair will grow for up to five years, stop growing for up to four months and fall out, leaving its place to a new hair.

Women and hair loss

The most common cause of hair loss in both men and women is a condition known as “androgenetic alopecia”. Women lose their hair as often as men do, but usually not to the same degree of severity. In both cases, hair loss is caused by genetic and hereditary factors. Hair loss may become noticeable in women as early as in their late twenties and up to their early forties. Typically, hair will start to thin on the crown of the head. Hair loss in women is more diffuse and occurs over a broader area than men. Unlike men, women usually do not develop bald spots, but will rather experience overall thinning. This process rarely progresses to reach a state of complete baldness.

Why do women lose their hair?

Many factors can influence susceptibility to hair loss, a genetically acquired condition. Women are more likely to start losing their hair during times of hormonal changes such as puberty and menopause.

The loss of hair has been linked to the presence of androgens (male sex hormones) that act on hair follicles of the scalp. The important presence of estrogens (female hormones) in women plays a significant role in counteracting the effects of hair loss attributed to androgens. As women who are genetically predisposed to hair loss reach menopause and their level of estrogens drops, their resistance to hair loss diminishes. This will in turn cause susceptible hair follicles to miniaturize and hair to thin.

How do I know how much hair I will lose?

Unfortunately, there are no predicting factors that can determine the extent of hair loss. This may vary from one individual to the next.



Telephone: 1-888-HAIR-077

HAIR LOSS IN WOMEN



How do I know if my hair loss is abnormal?

Men and women will usually shed between 100 to 125 hairs per day, noticeable on a comb, a brush or in the shower, for example. As the hair cycle continues, these hairs are immediately replaced as new ones begin to grow. Hair loss that becomes visible is due to either excessive shedding, over and above 125 hairs per day, or, more commonly in those who have androgenetic alopecia, falling hairs are replaced with miniaturized ones. With each cycle, hair miniaturizes causing hair to become thinner.

What other factors can influence hair loss in women?

Hair loss can be the result of hormonal changes, thyroid imbalances, genetic factors, stressful life events, illnesses such as cancer or lupus, recent surgeries, infections, medications, nutritional deficiencies and excessive dieting. A clinical examination by your physician will help determine what is the cause of hair loss in each particular case.

How common is it for women to lose their hair?

Hair loss is mostly seen in women following menopause. However, it is estimated that 40 to 50% of women will be affected by hair loss by the time they reach menopause.

Does hair loss happen gradually?

Hair loss in women is progressive and the stages of hair loss that occur differ from those observed in men. In women, hair loss begins with a uniform thinning of the hair on the crown. This area is surrounded by a circular band of normally dense hair, where the hair on the frontal fringe is preserved. With age, the thinning of the crown may become more pronounced and, after menopause, the crown may become bald¹.

Dealing with hair loss

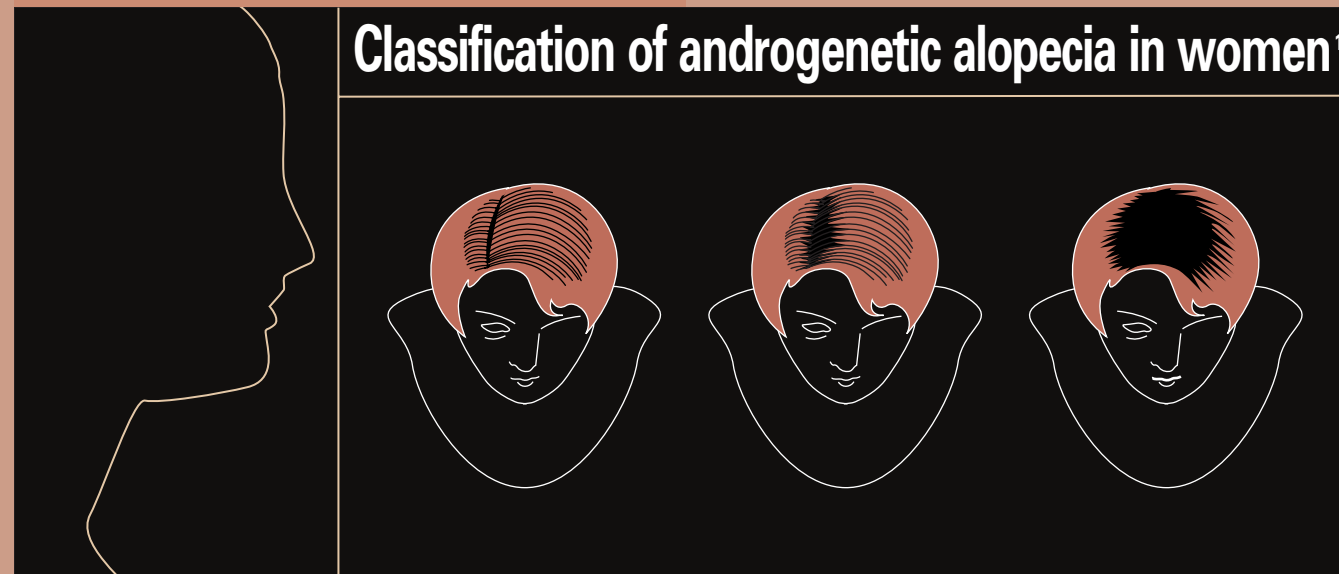
Research shows that losing hair is a stressful experience for both sexes but is even more distressing for women. In fact, psychological studies show that women have a harder time dealing with hair loss than men do. Compared to men, women also report a more negative body image as a result of hair loss. Typically, women are more conscious about their appearance, feel less physically attractive and try harder to conceal their hair loss.

What treatment options are available to women to deal with hair loss?

Women experiencing hair loss should seek the advice of a physician to determine the cause and evaluate the available treatment options. Unfortunately, there is no cure for androgenetic hair loss. However, options are available to control and deal with the condition.

Many over-the-counter products contain agents that have a “thickening” effect on thinning hair. These agents do not actually grow more hair. However, they may give the impression that hair has become thicker since they coat the hair shaft, thereby increasing its diameter. These cosmetic products are only a temporary solution since they are washed out and must be reapplied after every shampoo.

For women who have lost considerable amounts of hair with a great amount of scalp exposed, topical therapies are usually ineffective. A partial hairpiece or wig are the best alternatives. For more information on the best treatment option for you, consult your physician.



1. Ludwig E. Classification of the types of androgenetic alopecia occurring in the female sex. *British Journal of Dermatology* 1977; 97: 247.