

# Hair Loss

It's normal for your hair to fall out periodically, particularly at the end of the summer. Dermatitis, seborrhoea, dandruff or grease may be related to it; other causes include stress, anaemia due to lack of iron, prolonged fever, hormone problems, childbirth, cancer chemotherapy and certain medicines. It is normal for hair to fall out for a period of time, 2 or 3 months after serious stress.

Hair loss can affect different parts of the body.

*Androgenic alopecia*, typical in men, is the commonest type of hair loss. It affects mainly the temples and the crown of the head. The hereditary factor is very important. It often has a psychological impact. It is very widespread and increases with age: it affects 30% of 30-year-old men, 40% of 40-year-olds and 50% of 50-year-olds. It is rare in women: if it does appear, it is usually in elderly women or those with hormone disorders. In this case, it is a serious cause for concern.

When hair loss affects a small area, it may be caused by a wound healing, by *alopecia areata* (an inflammatory skin condition of unknown origin), by the patient pulling out their hair (trichotillomania) or else by ringworm (a fungal infection).

If the hair all over the body is affected, this is called *alopecia universalis* and may be permanent, from birth, or caused by medicines, in which case it usually is temporary.

## How long does it last?

If triggered by a temporary cause, hair loss normally lasts 3-4 months and then hair returns to normal. If the cause is permanent, the baldness will not return to normal on its own.

## Can it be treated?

It depends on the cause, particularly bearing in mind that there is sometimes more than one

cause. Your doctor will decide the treatment for each cause, such as stress or anaemia.

Normal hair loss at the end of summer should not be treated. You should always avoid pulling too much when you brush or comb your hair, too many dyes and harsh shampoos or conditioners. When long hair drops out it's more noticeable than short hair, on the floor, on your comb and in the wash basin. That's why some people think they are losing a lot of hair.

Choosing one of the treatments available for androgenic alopecia depends on its cause and the patient's preference:

- Both men and women can be treated with minoxidil, a medication that is applied directly to the head, every day indefinitely. Its effectiveness can be evaluated after a few months. If patients stop using it, their hair will start to fall out again.
- Men can be treated with finasteride, which may inhibit male hormones. It improves baldness in the long term, but we insist that it can block male hormones. It is contra-indicated in women, especially pregnant women, because it can cause foetal malformations.
- Hair transplants and surgery are other secondary alternatives.

Isolated patches of hair loss should be examined by your doctor to decide the treatment suitable for the cause.

