

Hair Loss

How diet and lifestyle can help prevent your hair from falling out...

“How do I stop my hair from falling out” is one of the most common questions I get from males and females alike. Hair is a major aspect of vanity that is often seen as a reflection of the individual’s health. And although it is not as serious as ‘internal’ problems such as heart disease and cancer, hair loss can still have devastating emotional effects.

The most common mistake is that people often look at hair loss as an ‘external’ problem. It is important to understand that nothing ‘external’ happens without ‘internal’ problems. Hair loss is one of the body’s ways of saying ‘there’s a problem somewhere’, but it is very rare that people consider addressing other parts of the body as treatment for hair loss. In addition to hair care routines and hair products, diet and lifestyle play a major role in the health and vitality of your hair.

What’s causing your hair loss?

Hair loss can be attributed to several factors. Most commonly the cause of hair loss is not a single factor, but a combination of several factors that accumulate over the years and result in not only hair loss but other health problems as well. Some factors that contribute to hair loss include:

- o Heredity
- o Blood quality and poor circulation
- o Diet
- o Lifestyle (e.g. alcohol, smoking, insufficient sleep, stress, etc.)
- o Use and quality of hair products
- o Sun exposure
- o Hormonal imbalance
- o Illness and high fever
- o Sudden weight loss
- o Iron deficiency
- o Heavy metal toxicity (e.g. mercury dental filling, pollution, or smoking)
- o Stress
- o Vitamin deficiencies (e.g. B-complex vitamins and zinc)

Diet and hair loss

Hair loss is tied to high-fat, high-protein diets, which damage the kidneys and create acidic blood. Meat and dairy products aggravate the problem, as well as too much sugar in the diet.

With the popularity of protein diets for weight loss, hair problems are becoming more prominent. Protein diets create acidity in the body which can damage hair and cause its frequent loss. A balance of protein, complex carbohydrates and fats is very important for general health, which is reflected in your hair.

What can you do?

The best thing to do is to improve the diet by eliminating foods that aggravate hair loss and increasing the foods that could improve hair quality and thickness. Also, it is important to balance any vitamin/mineral deficiencies by choosing the correct diet, lifestyle, and supplements. So, try the following:

- o Have regular meals and snacks (ideally three meals and two snacks throughout the day)
- o Add complex carbohydrates (i.e. brown bread, brown rice, oats, beans, pulses, etc.) on a daily basis. These are rich in fibre and help to flush out toxins and excess hormones
- o Increase fruits, vegetables, and salads daily. These are rich in antioxidants that nourish the hair and combat the effects of stress and environmental pollution.
- o Increase essential fats from raw nuts and seeds, and their oils. These fats improve hair texture, and prevent dry, brittle hair that is more prone to falling out.
- o Reduce saturated fat found mainly in foods of animal sources such as dairy products and red meat. Saturated fats block the pores and suffocate hair follicles. These fats also add to hormonal imbalances which can aggravate the problem

- o Cut out or reduce refined foods and sugars found in white bread/rice, desserts, chocolates, etc. These foods are empty calories and rob the body of essential nutrients which should be used for hair growth and maintenance.

Vitamins and Minerals

Hair loss may be an indication of various vitamin deficiencies, so you should try to add foods that are rich in the following vitamins and minerals:

- **B-vitamins and Biotin** are necessary for the health and growth of hair. They are found in wholegrains, brown rice, broccoli, cauliflower, beans, lentils, peas, nuts, and sunflower seeds. It is important to note, however, that various factors destroy B vitamins in food, including high heat, cooking, and alcohol.
- **Zinc** stimulates hair growth by enhancing immune function. Foods rich in zinc include fish, poultry, pecans, brazil nuts, pumpkin seeds, ginger, mushrooms
- **Iron** deficiency is very often linked to hair loss. Iron is found in poultry and fish, broccoli, wholegrains, and green leafy vegetables. At the same time, you must decrease your intake of iron-robbars such as tea, coffee and soft drinks because they interfere with its absorption.
- **Vitamin C** helps in improving scalp circulation; it also enhances iron absorption. Vitamin C is found in kiwi, papaya, oranges, green and red peppers, and most other fruits and vegetables.
- **Vitamin E** increases oxygen uptake, which improves circulation to the scalp. It also improves the health and growth of hair. Vitamin E is in olive oil, avocados, and raw nuts and seeds.

Note: It is recommended to take a quality multi vitamin/mineral daily that includes high levels of B vitamins and vitamin C. For any other supplements, consult your nutritionist or health care provider.

Lifestyle

- o You must address your stress levels. Stress has devastating effects on your body and that includes the health of your hair. If you cannot remove the stress from your life, then look into stress management such as meditation, dancing, music, prayer, massages, hot baths or whatever else suits you. Also, try to get at least 6-8 hours of sleep each night to give the body a chance to grow and repair. Resting the body is very important for hair rejuvenation.
- o Avoid exposure to external toxins such as pollution, first- or second-hand smoke, mercury fillings, etc. Toxins are often taken away from important organs (e.g. heart, lungs) and deposited in the hair which can cause scalp problems and hair loss.
- o Get regular moderate exercise for improved circulation. Start with 20 minutes, 3 times a week, which is needed to keep circulation going.

Hair care

- o Hair products may also be a factor in hair loss. These can include hair dyes, shampoos, gels, sprays, etc. It is best to minimise the use of hair products and hair dyes as much as possible
- o Try to alternate among several different hair care products to give the hair follicles a chance to breath
- o Use natural shampoos and conditioners when possible (many choices are available at most health shops)
- o Try not to comb your hair when wet, and avoid tying your hair back in a tight pony tail for long periods of time
- o Avoid using a blow dryer and other heated appliances, and reduce exposing your hair to the sun

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