

How Stress Can Damage Your Hair

Description

There's no denying that the busy modern lifestyle can be stressful. Most households require two incomes to function these days, leaving parents struggling to balance work and raising a family, not to mention a host of other obligations. You may suffer from sleep loss, weight gain, anxiety, or all of the above, and you may not even realize that stress could be a contributing factor.

We're learning more and more about the effects of stress, and it doesn't just impact your mental or emotional state. It can also cause physical side effects. For example, corticosteroid, a hormone associated with stress, has been found to suppress immune function, reducing the body's ability to fight pathogens and making us more susceptible to illness.

In addition, stress could be a contributing factor to temporary or ongoing hair loss. There are three main hair loss conditions related to stress: alopecia areata, telogen effluvium, and trichotillomania. What are they and what can you do to halt hair loss and minimize the conditions causing it?

Alopecia Areata

Alopecia areata isn't strictly related to stress, as it's a condition characterized by your immune system attacking the body's hair follicles. It can affect not only the hair on your head, but all over your body, causing it to fall out and resulting in patchiness or overall thinning. In some cases, hair regrows without further incident, while you might also experience regrowth only to have hair fall out again.

Generally speaking, alopecia areata could be related to any number of factors, and is considered an autoimmune disorder. That said, it is believed that this condition can be triggered or made worse by severe stress. While there is no known cure for this condition, stress-related alopecia could decline along with stress reduction.

In the meantime, there are a variety of treatment options to consider, some of which may speed hair regrowth. Immunosuppressants may help to reduce the mistaken immune response while you address and attempt to reduce stressors.

You may also want to consider technological innovations like low-level light therapy (LLLT). This FDA-cleared treatment involves the use of a [laser cap](#) that can improve hair thickness and growth with just 30 minutes of wear every other day. It improves cellular respiration and stimulates hair follicles to help combat the effects of hair loss. This is an all natural, pain-free, chemical-free, and hands-free hair growth treatment option.

Telogen Effluvium

Before you can understand telogen effluvium, you need to know that hair growth occurs in three phases: anagen, catagen, and telogen. The anagen (active) phase is when hair grows, and for any

given strand of hair, it lasts several years. This is followed by the catagen (transitional) phase, when the root begins to shrink, over the course of a couple weeks. Finally, the telogen (resting) phase occurs, lasting a few months, during which the hair is shed.

At any given time, only about 10% of follicles are in the telogen phase. However, significant stress can cause a condition called telogen effluvium, by which more hair follicles (up to about 30%) enter the telogen phase, typically resulting in noticeable thinning. This is generally considered a temporary condition brought on by some kind of shock to the system. As with alopecia areata brought on by stress, this could be remedied through stress reduction techniques, as well as treatments like LLLT that help hair to regrow faster and thicker.

Trichotillomania

While alopecia areata and telogen effluvium are physical symptoms that could be related to extreme stress, trichotillomania is different. It has more to do with how stress can impact your mental and emotional state, and your behaviors.

It's a common trope in comedy to pull out one's hair as an indication of anger or stress. However, you might not realize that it's an actual condition. Trichotillomania is a psychological disorder in which people feel compelled to pull on their own hair, including eyebrows, eyelashes, and hair on the head or body.

This condition is often linked to stress, anxiety, and other negative emotions, and may be a form of self-soothing, gaining control, or otherwise coping with negative feelings. Cognitive and behavioral therapy are generally accepted as the best means of addressing the underlying causes of trichotillomania, but in the meantime, you can attempt to replenish the hair on your scalp with LLLT and complementary treatments.

Minimizing Stress

Although many people suffering stress-related hair loss are keen to treat the symptoms, it's important to understand the importance of addressing the cause, as well. Reducing stress may require you to cut out stressors, including obligations that spur your anxiety. A healthy diet and regular exercise can also help, as can treatments like therapy and meditation. Don't hesitate to speak to a trusted physician to learn more and seek referrals to specialists regarding high stress and the effects that are damaging your hair.

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