Crossing the (Hair)Line

Are precious strands missing from the front of your head?

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“Your hairline is made up of some of the most fragile and delicate hair on your head,” says Robert Dorin, DO, a New York City hair specialist and restoration surgeon. “Any thinning is very apparent early on, since it is at a place everyone sees easily.”

Although there are many reasons why people suffer from thinned-out hairlines, some folks inherit genes that predispose them to hair loss in this area, much like others who inherit genes that cause them to lose hair at the top and back of the head.

“Women tend to retain their hairline and thin in the top of the scalp, unlike men, who usually thin in both regions,” Dorin explains. “But women can and do also thin in a pattern similar to men.”

Additionally, hair loss can also be triggered by health conditions, such as a hormonal imbalance. What’s more, medications and lifestyle factors, such as stress or a poor diet, may cause the loss of precious strands from our heads.

Sometimes, what a person may think is hair loss is actually the hair follicles simply at rest. “The only practical way [to tell if hair is in a resting stage] is time,” Dorin says. “If a follicle sheds due to it cycling through a telogen [resting] phase, it will re-grow in time, usually 6 to 12 months, unlike a dead follicle.”

Although women rarely develop a receding hairline, they are susceptible to hairline damage. One cause for loss in this area is repeated tension on the scalp, which can result in thinning hair. Often, the culprits for this disastrous damage are hairstyles such as tight cornrows, braids, buns and extensions. These styles can trigger traction alopecia, typically characterized by hair loss around the hairline, according to Dorin.

Traction alopecia results when excessive pressure or tension is placed on the hair follicles. These cell-lined sacs shoot out the strands that we seeing growing from the scalp. They are easily damaged by too much tugging or pulling; if the tension continues over a period of time, the hairline can begin to grow weaker. This means strands shed faster than normal, so hair isn’t allowed to grow to its full length.

Indeed, the hair may even stop growing completely if the pressure continues for a long period of time. “Typically, traction alopecia occurs right at the front of the hairline, at the temples or the hairline right

above the ears," Dorin says.

To avoid traction alopecia, Dorin suggests discontinuing hairstyles that cause this tension. Also "avoid using hard bristle brushes that tug on the hair, and reduce extreme heat usage, especially around your edges," he advises.

Dorin also recommends using a product with 18-methyl eicosanoic acid, or 18-MEA, a fatty substance on the outside of the hair cuticle that protects its surface and minimizes future damage. This substance also helps to prevent shaft damage to the viable hairs that remain and supply moisture to the surrounding hair and scalp.

If you've already suffered a partial loss of your crowning glory, there's still good news. Hair can be restored in part or whole with the use of medications and cosmetic surgery. Some treatments to consider include topical medications, such as minoxidil and Propecia (finasteride) to help stabilize, prevent and, in some cases, recover lost hair. (Currently, Propecia is only FDA-approved for use by men.)

But, Dorin cautions, "These medications tend not work on restoring hair loss in the hairline." What's more, they need to be used on a daily basis to continue working.

In addition, there are laser treatment caps men and women can use to stop their thinning hair from totally disappearing. These caps help stabilize hair loss and thicken the diameter of strands, making tresses appear fuller. If trauma is very severe and permanent damage has occurred, however, a hair transplant may be your best bet.

Ultimately, the best treatment of all, Dorin says, "is to prevent hair loss in the first place."

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