

# Article for Glow magazine

## Questions and answers for Hair Loss feature GLOW Jan-Mar 2010

1. Is hair loss in women as common as it is in men?

*V(FoodAG):*

A healthy adult loses about 50 hairs from your head every day; several factors will affect this rate. If sustained losses of more than 100 hairs per day generally indicate that something is wrong.

Temporary increase in hair loss can result from dietary factors, vitamin A excess, drugs, radiation, high fever, stress or hormonal factors related to pregnancy, athletes with iron-deficiency anemia and scalp infections.

**CTE (chronic teleogen effluvium)** is hair loss evenly distributed across the scalp as opposed to hair loss just at the top of the head. Women affected by this type of hair loss are usually between ages 18-50. Tests have shown that women with low dietary iron intakes/ suffer from low iron stores in the body shed more hair than it used to.

Loss of blood during menstruation also depletes iron stores. Other types of hair loss in women also caused by post-menopausal (reduction in level of oestrogen-female hormones), HRT and pregnancy (post-natal).

In males, changes in the level of the sex hormones circulating in the blood can affect the scalp, causing a shift from terminal hair to vellus hair production (beginning at the temples and the crown of the head) called **male pattern baldness**.

Thyroid imbalances, general health disturbances, medication given can produce changes in hair growth for both women and men.

\*Terminal hair – heavy pigmented and sometimes curly hair found on your head, eyebrows and eyelashes (changes of distribution begins at puberty)

\*Vellus hair – fine 'peach fuzz' hairs located over much of the body surface.

2. Can a poor diet contribute to hair loss? How so?

*V(FoodAG):*

Yes. Having inadequate protein or iron in your diet or poor nourishment in other ways can cause you to experience hair loss. Fad diets, crash diets and certain illnesses such as eating disorders can cause poor nutrition leading to hair loss problems.

3. Are there any specific foods that keep hair healthy? Can you give some examples?

*V(FoodAG):*

When the body does not get enough protein, it conserves the protein it does get by shifting hair growth into the resting phase. Within 2 to 3 months, the person usually sees visible hair loss.

To reverse and prevent this, eating enough protein such as meats, eggs, fish.

Vegetarians can increase their protein intake by adding nuts, seeds and beans to their diet.

Eating a diet containing little or no red meat is likely to give rise to low iron stores in the body. Red meat contains richest sources of dietary iron, L-lysine and vitamin B12. Clams, oysters and organ meats also top the list of good iron source.

Vegetarian sources of iron are iron-fortified cereals, soybeans, pumpkin seeds, lentils and spinach.

Vitamin C can be found in most citrus fruits, tomatoes and green vegetables. (For more information on nutrition guides, please refer to [www.foodadvisory.sg](http://www.foodadvisory.sg))

4. Can people suffering from hair loss take any specific vitamins/supplements to encourage hair growth?

*V(FoodAG):*

Iron supplement, Vitamin C and vitamin B12 to help iron absorption, L-lysine (amino acid).

Eating a large portion of red meat every day would certainly raise iron levels but is not an option of most people. 24 mg of iron supplement a day will be needed for up to 6 months to have the desired effect. (More information will be available on [www.foodadvisory.sg](http://www.foodadvisory.sg))

5. Would you say there's a link between hair loss and poor health practices like smoking, not getting enough exercise, etc?

*V(FoodAG):*

Playing sports or other aerobic exercises will help increase blood circulation and reduce stress, your heart will get stronger and more efficient in delivering oxygen (carrying blood cells) to all parts of your body. Hence more circulating hormones and nutrients will be delivered to the scalp to maintain healthy hair follicles.

There is insufficient evidence to support the relation between smoking and hair loss but smoking will decrease blood flow in our body thus reducing oxygen supply to the head and scalp.

6. What should women suffering from hair loss remember when caring for their hair? Any simple tips?

*V(FoodAG):*

Losing twice as many hairs would be observed when combing or shampooing. The hair on their head may begin to feel thinner to them although this may not be obvious to anyone else. Hair shed or reductions in the length growth contribute to a reduction of hair volume in long term although it may vary between individuals.

Colouring, perming or straightening hair may cause hair loss due to breakage.

The frequency of washing your hair less often will temporarily increase hair shedding, so try shampooing daily. Rinse with warm water and use a good quality conditioner as necessary. Avoid harsh towel drying (pat the hair dry instead) and avoid hot hair dryers/ heated rollers.