

HAIR AFTER SURGERY

There are growth and resting phases of hair. Generally, 90% of hairs are in the growth phase and 10% are resting. Because of that ratio, you really don't notice the hair loss since you are growing a lot more hair than you are losing (you lose hair in the resting phase). Some things can change this around.

Hair is obviously important to us. Hair is a part of our self-image. Hair loss is a concern after weight loss surgery. That's because nutrition plays a significant role in hair health. When the body is threatened (as by surgery) it prioritizes how nutrition is used, preferring to be used by vital organs like the brain and heart etc. and not the hair or nails.

Hair can be lost for a number of reasons, and after weight loss surgery, it is due to the stress of the surgery itself.

It is normal to lose up to about 100 hairs a day. This is the result of the normal hair growth cycle. Hairs will grow for a few years, then rest for a few months, shed, and regrow. "Telogen effluvium" is the fancy word that describes when some stress causes hair roots to be pushed prematurely into resting phase. This is typically what happens after surgery.

If there is some "shock to the body", a person can lose as much as 70% of the scalp hair about 2 to 3 months after the "shock". Most don't lose that much, however. So, it can feel like handfuls of hair are coming out! Hair loss rarely lasts more than 6 months. If it does, than we would need to examine some other causes.

Some stresses that can cause hair loss are:

- High fever
- Severe infection
- Major surgery
- Sudden physical trauma
- Chronic debilitating illness (such as cancer or end-stage liver disease)
- Hormonal disruption (such as pregnancy, childbirth menopause)
- Sudden weight-loss
- Crash dieting (your diet after surgery is kind of like this)
- Anorexia
- Heavy metal toxicity
- Some medications

Nutritionally, deficiencies in protein, iron and zinc can be held culprit. Other nutrients associated with hair health include vitamin A, inositol, folate, B-6 and essential fatty acids. Hair loss can also be caused by certain diseases, including thyroid disease and polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS).

Conclusion

Though Hair loss is distressing to our patients, there is not enough evidence that hair loss is preventable because it is most likely caused by surgery and rapid weight-loss.

But if hair loss continues, it can be indicative of a nutritional problem, especially iron deficiency.

Taking additional supplements above what is recommended might just be a waste of money. Some hair products too can be quite expensive and probably won't transfer hair follicles out of the resting stage any sooner.

My advice would be to make sure you follow up with your surgeon, dietitian and bariatric nurse for continued assessment of your nutritional health. This includes getting your required labs done as ordered.

If an issue is identified, it can be corrected and you won't suffer from unnecessary excessive hair loss after surgery.

If there are additional supplements that you might want to try like biotin, discuss this with a health care practitioner for advice and guidance and to choose appropriate dosing. An informed hair stylist can be helpful as well