Numbered citations in parentheses refer to the list in Chapter 10: References.

Hair Loss In Women: Causes, Diagnosis, and Treatment

Dr. Susan Stuart and I, Dr. Chaffoo, see women with hair loss every week at California Hair MD. Some notice gradual thinning, while others come to us with sudden shedding, bald patches, or changes in their hairline. This article **explains the conditions we see, how we determine the cause, and the medical and surgical treatments we consider**.

Richard A.K. Chaffoo, MD, FACS, FICS, and Susan M. Stuart, MD, FAAD | **California Hair MD**

To schedule a consultation, please contact us online or call the office most convenient for you:

- San Diego: **(858) 500-1116**
- La Jolla: **(858) 500-1116**
- Newport Beach: **(858) 500-1116**
- Beverly Hills: **(858) 500-1116**
- Corona del Mar: **(858) 500-1116**

About Hair Loss In Women

Dr. Stuart and I explain to patients that **hair loss in women can have more than one cause**. The first step in any hair restoration procedure is to establish the diagnosis before choosing treatment.

Early evaluation is particularly important when inflammation or scarring may be present, because follicles that have been permanently destroyed cannot be restored with medication. Improvement usually takes months, and we follow our patients over the course of several years to determine whether treatment is helping and whether their benefits are being maintained.

How Common Is Hair Loss In Women?

Hair loss (alopecia) in women is a common disorder with numerous causes. The most common chronic cause is **female pattern hair loss or FPHL**, which affects millions of women in the US and globally. It becomes progressively more common with age, although reported rates vary considerably according to ethnicity, population studied, and diagnostic criteria. [1, 2, 3, 4] In US studies, FPHL that is clinically apparent affects 2-5% of women in their 20s, with **its frequency increasing progressively with advancing age**. [1] Several studies have reported rates approaching **40-50% among older women**. [2,3] FPHL can begin during a woman's reproductive years but becomes even more common with advancing age and menopause. Menopause itself should not be considered the only cause of this hair loss, but instead one factor, along with aging, genetic susceptibility, hormonal influence, and other biologic factors.

Hair loss can also be caused by conditions besides FPHL, including telogen effluvium, alopecia areata, traction alopecia, and scarring alopecias. It may also be associated with thyroid disease, iron deficiency, nutritional deficiencies, hormonal disorders such as PCOS, autoimmune diseases, certain medications, rapid weight loss, and other conditions. [4] Although FPHL does not affect one's physical health directly, it often has a substantial effect upon self-image, confidence, and quality of life.

What Does Female Pattern Hair Loss Look Like?

FPHL appears clinically as **diffuse thinning over the central part line of the scalp and crown**. As it progresses, the part line widens, but the frontal hairline is usually maintained. [5] This is often referred to as a "Christmas-tree pattern." Some women also develop thinning in the temples. [6] The hair loss is gradual and progressive, although some women notice increased shedding. [7] With time, the involved hairs become finer, shorter, and less dense, which is a process called miniaturization. [8] As it occurs, the underlying scalp maintains its normal appearance, with no redness, scaling, or scarring. In contrast, male pattern hair loss presents itself as gradual frontal hairline recession with balding in the frontal and crown areas of the head. Sudden hair loss, bald patches, scalp redness, pain, tenderness, heavy scaling, or scarring may indicate another cause and should be evaluated. [8]

Female pattern hair loss (FPHL) shows a widening of the central part with a more pronounced "Christmas tree" pattern of thinning toward the frontal scalp. Trichoscopic appearance of female pattern hair loss also presents follicular miniaturization, an increased proportion of single-hair follicular units, and variations in hair shaft diameter.