

Balding

I write this article at the age of 27.5. Two years ago, I wasn't balding at all, and a year ago, I can't be sure. But now, I am sure I am.

My reasons:

My uncles(maternal side) are bald, not completely, but with very advanced signs of balding My father has very thin hair, a receded hairline, and has tried a lot of things to maintain some hair, but is balding. Earlier this year, I noticed more hair loss and pronounced hair thinning on the top of my head. A little bit towards the front, and a lot of the top. Additionally, a tiny bald spot in between these two areas. When I got a haircut a week ago(this is september), my barber unprompted mentioned that my hair is much thinner on top, and asked if I'm losing hair. This was definitely the "nail in the coffin"

Now, losing hair can have many reasons. From the way I understand it, the reasons can be split into two categories, the primary and the lifestyle. As you might have guessed, the primary reasons are the factors that are making men lose their hair- the lifestyle reasons can hasten or make things better/worse, to different degrees, but are not the primary drivers of hair loss. In an attempt to understand, I will write about introduction, causes, stages, treatments, operations, famous cases to provide a complete article to educate yourself on male balding.

Part 1 Introduction

Male pattern baldness is also called androgenetic alopecia. It typically involves hairlines receding to an "m" pattern, and thinning progressing to loss of hair at the crown of the head.

From looking around, it seems to me that now it is more likely for men to lose their hair or show baldness signs before the age of 35, than not. Before I noticed signs of hair loss in myself, I didn't really think about it at all, and never noticed anything. I know people who are bald, are balding, and aren't, but now I think of those distinctions more clearly.

Circa 2009

Hair growth begins under the skin in structures called follicles. Each strand of hair normally grows for 2 to 6 years, goes into a resting phase for several months, and then falls out. The cycle starts over when the follicle begins growing new hair. Increased levels of androgens in hair follicles can lead to a shorter cycle of hair growth and the growth of shorter and thinner strands of hair. Additionally, there is a delay in the growth of new hair to replace strands that are shed. This is precisely why it is suggested that if you notice excessive falling of hair, and hair thinning, that it can be an indicator of baldness setting in.

There is a popular scale for men to grade their baldness, called the Norwood scale. I have read that it is generally hard to diagnose stage 1 yourself- take pictures over weeks or months, and ask for outside opinions. I've also heard the later stage you're at, the harder it is to "reverse" the

hair loss- which will make sense soon. Personally, I found the very noticeable hair thinning to be the obvious marker, as I wasn't able to draw conclusions from the slight receding nature of my hairline- a bit of receding is natural, and is referred to as a "maturing hairline", the key point being here that it should mature for a bit, then largely STOP maturing. There are better infographics, and the specific "pattern" of baldness can vary, but this will do :

Part 2 Causes

Now, the second meatiest part of this article. Why does this fuckery even happen? Why doesn't it really happen to women?

As stated before, there are primary and lifestyle causes. We'll look at the primary causes in more detail.

A major reason, perhaps THE major reason for male hair loss is related to hormones called androgens. Androgens are important for normal male sexual development, and impact hair growth, sex drive and other sex organ related features. One gene that has a role to play is the AR gene. This gene provides instructions to make androgen receptors, which respond to androgens like dihydrotestosterone(DHT). Increased androgens or heightened sensitivity to androgens like DHT can lead to shorter cycles of hair growth, and DHT is known to stimulate the process of follicle miniaturization. The hair hence grows shorter and thinner, till the follicles become too small to produce new hairs.

DHT in other parts of the body doesn't seem to have this effect, and may even contribute to healthy hair growth; but on the scalp, apparently, it worsens it and causes follicular miniaturization.

Creatine has been linked, but not proved to increase hair loss, likely through increased DHT production. A lot of heavy gym goers and bodybuilders are bald- it would be interesting to see if there's a connection there.

5-alpha-reductase (5-AR) is the enzyme that converts testosterone into the much more potent androgen, DHT. There is a bit of a question here though: is it increased testosterone, or increased conversion of it to DHT, or increased sensitivity to DHT that causes the hair loss? I don't know. Either way though, this helps explain why women don't suffer from male pattern baldness(MPB). They also lose hair, and can go bald, but much later in life- it is thought that estrogen plays a positive role in delaying age related hardening and tightening effect on the scalp, so there is better blood flow to the follicles.

Genetics is a great indicator to help you determine if you need to worry about baldness. If it exists both paternally and maternally, like it does for me, it is only a matter of "when". If not, the situation gets murkier- popular studies suggest the X chromosome has a bigger part to play in baldness, and we inherit that from our mothers. Females have two X chromosomes, possibly another reason they are much less predisposed to balding.

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