

Telogen Effluvium - Reflective hair loss

Telogen Effluvium is a medical term for excessive diffuse hair shedding. Throughout our lives we all constantly shed 50 -100 hairs per day. These figures naturally fluctuate so you should not worry or consider it excessive if you notice a little more than that. What is usually considered excessive is prolonged shedding of 300 hairs upwards per day.

Hair growth cycle

Each hair on the body, including the scalp, is housed in a hair follicle and each follicle has its own growth cycle depending on where it is on the body. The shortest are the eye lashes and eyebrows, approximately 5-6 whilst hairs on the head have a growth range of 5-11 years. The rate of hair growth is primarily determined before birth.

On an average head there are approximately 100,000 hairs in different phases of the growth cycle. Some hairs are in the growth phase (anagen hairs). Others are not growing but resting and these are known as catagen hairs. Yet others are in the shedding phase and are known as telogen hairs. Following shedding, hair follicles will, after a period, start to produce new hair bulbs, unless there is some other underlying condition.

What may cause Telogen Effluvium

The condition Telogen Effluvium occurs when anagen hairs change to telogen hairs more quickly, resulting in the greater speed of hair loss. This change to the telogen phase can be triggered by trauma of various kinds – physical illness, high temperature, sepsis but also stress and anxiety and emotional upset caused by bereavement and loss and other life pressures, as well as poor diet, sudden weight change and a lack of certain nutrients such as ferritin. The hair loss is, in that sense, reflecting physical and emotional pressures on the body, hence its being described as reflective hair loss.

Due to the current pandemic, many people are experiencing a very stressful and frightening time and it would not be unusual for this to show itself in hair loss due to telogen effluvium.

How best to manage your hair during such reflective hair loss.

Firstly, do not stop shampooing and conditioning your hair, as some people do, believing that they will encourage greater hair loss by rubbing the scalp. If you are too gentle with your hair then the shed hairs remain on your scalp and become matted and stick to adjacent growing (anagen) hairs, risking pulling these out and so making the condition worse. If the hair does become so matted, it will require cutting to remove. In the same way, reducing the use of brush and comb, will not reduce the hair shedding but can also lead to the above problem.

Similarly, if you normally blow dry your hair, then continuing with this on a medium setting will not adversely affect the hair shedding. Blow drying may also have a positive outcome, in giving the remaining hair an appearance of greater volume.

If you use dressing aids such as mousses, gel, wax or hair sprays, remember that these will be holding shed hairs in place through the day and so do not be over-worried if you then appear to have a significant loss when shampooing or showering.

There are products which may help, particularly those, such as menthol products which have a stimulating effect on the scalp.

The good news is that, for most people, this is a self-righting condition and normally requires no treatment, for recovery to take place. However, as it is a reflective condition, it is necessary to identify what may be the trigger factors in each case so that you can, if possible, seek to remove them. A consultation with a registered Trichologist may help you by identifying whether you have the condition and if so, what the likely trigger factors are and how they may be addressed.

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Published April 2020