

I

Why Treat Hair Loss?

At a point in our lives while growing up, we each form a mental image of ourselves.

We develop a picture of our face and body, an image of how we think others see us. When we look in a mirror, we identify with what we see and inwardly say, “That’s me.” Even without a mirror, we have an idea of the image of ourselves that we project to the world.

But as a man or woman begins to lose hair, the image in the mirror no longer matches the internal self-image developed over many years. This can be disturbing, since we pretty much feel the same as before. Hair loss does not affect our physical health, but it does make us look older. When we see our reflection in the mirror, a different image confronts us. We protest, “That isn’t me.”

Our hair is one of the most defining aspects of our appearance. A healthy head of hair makes us look attractive, youthful, and desirable. Our appearance directly affects our own self-image, and most of us want to maintain a self-image that is youthful and healthy looking.

Our appearance also affects how we interact with other people, both in how others respond to how we look, and how our appearance affects our own self-confidence. Having a full head of hair can improve the quality of our life, our success in business relationships, and our success in romance.

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But despite the fact that losing hair, and even going bald, is part of the normal process of aging, we often don't accept it. At age forty, most people feel pretty much the same as they did at age thirty, or even age twenty. Confronted with hair loss, people may begin to feel foreign to themselves and somewhat disoriented. This discomfort results in a desire to return to the former, more youthful appearance. Today there are many cosmetic, medical, and surgical options for people who really want to do something about hair loss.

Take one of my patients; I'll call him "Larry." I first met Larry in 1980, when he was thirty-five-years-old. He already had considerable frontal hair loss, but the hair on his crown and back of his head was quite dense. He was a physical fitness buff, and could not come to terms with his receding hairline. He worked out, felt pretty good, and looked great, except for his hair loss.

After considering all the options, Larry decided to have hair transplant surgery. At that time, surgical procedures for hair loss resulted in an "under construction" look for a period of time following surgery. Larry was a foreman of a crew of men who installed acoustical ceilings. It was possible for him to wear a hard hat or a baseball cap to cover his new grafts until they healed. Initially, keeping his hair transplants secret was a big concern to him. Then, after about three weeks, he began to tell his friends and co-workers about his surgery for hair loss.

There was a positive response from everyone, except for one co-worker. Larry explained to me that his co-worker, who we'll call "John," began harassing him about his hair transplants during his first month following surgery. The second month, John wanted to know if the surgery was painful, and then he wanted to know how much it cost. Soon after, I met with John, and he scheduled his own hair transplantation procedure.

People want to look the way they feel. A man or woman at age forty doesn't really expect to look twenty again, but increasingly more and more people want to keep a youthful appearance. Hair helps frame the face, and it directs attention very powerfully. Everyone has seen men with a few wispy strands of hair combed over the top of their heads in an attempt to frame their face with hair. Of course

their “comb-over” just directs more attention to their hair loss, which is not the desired effect.

Although our society tends to be youth-oriented, most people with hair loss are not preoccupied with achieving a perpetually youthful appearance. In fact, many people accept their hair loss as just a fact of life. Humans have an enormous ability to adjust to imperfect situations and go on with their lives. But if you’re reading this book, you probably have an interest in doing something about your hair loss.

Wanting to do something about hair loss is not just a matter of vanity. The desire to look better and have a more pleasing appearance is also a normal human attitude. Undeniably, hair loss adds years to a person’s appearance. Hair loss represents to men what wrinkles do to women. And hair loss for women is even worse than wrinkles! And



Female hair loss

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while men with hair loss often state that they don't care about losing their hair, if there were some form of magic that could instantly and permanently give them a full head of hair just by wishing it, the vast majority would do just that.

In 1995, Sean Connery stated in an interview, "I don't understand men who want hair transplants." That same month, he was photographed going to a social event wearing a hairpiece. Five years later, he seemed to have accepted his baldness in his personal life. He does, however, continue to wear a hairpiece for movie roles that call for a man with a full head of hair.

The media, especially television and movies, continue to place enormous emphasis on models, actors, and actresses with hair. Women portrayed in the media, and in advertisements for almost any product, generally have full heads of hair. Entire industries are dedicated to women's hair care products and hair care styling services, all with the goal of helping women make the most of the hair they have.

The significance of hair to women in our society is so great, that women suffering chemotherapy for cancer treatment are often more emotionally devastated by their chemotherapy-induced hair loss than from their cancer.

Men's magazines rarely display a man with thinning hair, and almost never one who is bald. When the media displays an image of a desirable macho man, he is shown with a full head of hair. Unless, that is, the man is a "bad guy." Despite the increasing appearance of Hollywood talent and national sports celebrities with natural baldness or shaved heads, it still seems that when a bald man is portrayed in the media, more often than not, he is a villain.

When women were asked in a variety of surveys whether they thought men looked better bald or with hair, a majority replied that baldness did not influence their attraction to the opposite sex. Yet when shown digitally altered photos of the same men with and without hair, those same women said repeatedly that the men with hair looked more attractive to them.