



Resource Sheet #15
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Hair Shedding: Does Trauma Exacerbate It?

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Hair loss can be an unsettling and frustrating experience for males and females of all ages and backgrounds. Often, individuals undergoing hair loss seek out immediate solutions and cures; however, when working with conditions relating to the hair, it is important to recognize that hair is multifactorial and is affected by various aspects including genetic and environmental^{1,3}. Perhaps, one of the most common environmental components which almost everyone experiences in some shape or form is stress and trauma. Stress can present over different durations with long term repercussions and manifest in various forms for individuals. According to the American Institute of Stress, almost 77 percent of people have undergone some form of stress which impacts their physical health².

Indeed, many studies have found that stress is a causal factor implicated in hair loss^{1,3-6}. Exploring this connection between stress and hair loss, it has been discovered that stress can be a primary inducer of hair loss, an aggravating factor in hair loss, or a secondary problem in response to hair loss⁶. Unfortunately, with the latter, continued stress may progress into a vicious cycle perpetuating more hair loss. This cycle of events only elucidates the profound and psychosocial significance of hair.

One form of hair loss that is commonly caused by emotional or physiological stress is telogen effluvium⁶. Telogen effluvium (TE) is described as diffuse non-scarring hair loss that often occurs after a stressful or traumatic event³. Usually stemming from alterations in the hair cycle, this scalp disorder can present as either acute or chronic differentiated by a duration of hair loss less than or greater than six months respectively⁴.



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Unfortunately, to date, a targeted pharmacological therapy or cure has not been developed to specifically target hair loss ⁴. However, reconsidering the fact that hair loss is influenced by various factors including stress and trauma from the environment, it is possible to address one causal aspect: stress. Some forms of physiological stress that have reported associations with telogen effluvium include trauma from surgical operations, systemic illnesses, elevated fever, and hemorrhage ⁷. In recent times, COVID-19 infection was found to be a major inciting event for acute telogen effluvium approximately two to three months post infection ⁸. Emotional stress can stem from major negative and stressful life events including but not limited to loss of a loved one, divorce, unemployment, and traumatic experiences ⁹.

Nevertheless, by integrating stress-coping strategies into the management of hair loss disorders, one can begin to address and learn to work with the aggravating factors of the stress. One important aspect in dealing with stress is developing a strong supportive network or circle of individuals as well as incorporating various lifestyle habits that can serve a dual purpose of maintaining physical well-being and defusing stress. However, the impact of these treatment strategies may not be seen immediately, and they should not be considered as a cure-all solution for hair loss.

All in all, hair loss is unique to each and every individual and the steps that work for one individual may prove ineffective for another. Therefore, one should consult a dermatologist to seek medical guidance and recommendations as to the best course of action for their particular form of hair loss. Although the hair loss itself may not be immediately addressed, an individual can at least begin to gain a sense of control and plan on how to cope with their stress-induced hair loss.



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