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Don't lose your mind over your hair loss By Mitch Rustad

Shaving your head may seem totally chic when done voluntarily — Justin Timberlake, Jake Gyllenhaal or James Blake, anyone? — but it's not quite as cool when nature beats you to it.

In fact, for millions of men, hair loss can be downright traumatizing, creating a loss of confidence that debilitates even the most cocksure. But if you're losing your locks — whether it's genetic fate, extreme stress or another medical reason — you don't have to take follicle failure lying down.

Treatments approved by the Food and Drug Administration are available through your dermatologist, while proper nutrition and stress reduction can do wonders in preserving what you've still got.

But why does hair fall out in the first place?

"Genetics are the main culprit," says **Michael Eidelman**, a dermatologist in New York City, who adds that everything from a lack of vitamins, thyroid disease and anemia from a poor diet can also contribute to losing your locks. (To rule out such factors, simple blood work can be required, he says).

If you're one of the 35 million men (according to the American Hair Loss Council) in the United States who suffer from hair loss, you'll be wise though to keep your expectations in check. While aesthetic eyesores like love handles or unwanted body hair can be sucked, plucked and readily rectified, growing new hair on your head isn't nearly so straightforward.

"Unfortunately, there aren't a lot of really good options out there," Eidelman says. "So it's important to ask yourself how much it actually bothers you, and then discuss your options with a dermatologist."

"Start by asking yourself, 'Is the cost or time investment of treatment worth the actual benefits?'" adds Eidelman. "Some people aren't bothered that much, while others might be single and looking to meet someone and feeling sensitive. It's very individual."

But what exactly are your options? Here's a laundry list to consider.

Propecia This is the only FDA-approved oral therapy for hair loss that gets proven results, Eidelman says. "About a third of my patients get visible growth, and another third maintain what they have, but it won't work for everyone." Any initial results won't show up for at least 3 months, and discontinuing your daily pill will eventually negate any results. "In about 6 months, whatever hair you grew will be gone," Eidelman says. And fewer than 2 to 3 percent of his patients experience Propecia's potential side effects — decreased sexual libido, reduced ejaculation or erection problems.

Rogaine Also proven to regrow at least some hair in 85 percent of men with hereditary hair loss, Rogaine foam or liquid solution is applied directly to your scalp, twice a day, every day. "It's not the most effective treatment of all, because in my experience it has the least long-term efficacy," Eidelman says. "After a couple of years, some of the new growth sort of fades

out. But for many, it's better than nothing because not everyone is comfortable taking an oral pill." Experts also recommend that if you choose to use Rogaine, go with the extra strength option, as it generally produces better results.

Hair transplantation _Board-certified plastic surgeons have been successfully performing this type of procedure for more than 30 years, and the results are more natural looking than ever. "The quality in some treatments is much higher now than it was even 10 years ago," Eidelman says. "So it's a very viable option for some people." He suggests discussing your expectations with a dermatologist or plastic surgeon. Transplant techniques include punch grafts, mini-grafts and micro-grafts, which are generally performed on patients who desire a more modest change in hair fullness. Flaps, tissue-expansion and scalp-reduction are procedures that are usually more appropriate for patients who desire a more dramatic change.

Take your vitamins _Because hair is, physiologically speaking, living protein growing out of your head, it needs nutrients, like the rest of your body. "Nutritional deficiencies can wreak havoc on your hair," says Caren Feingold-Tishfield, R.D., of Foodtrainers, a nutritional consulting company in New York City. She recommends a healthful diet with at least 4 to 6 servings daily of fruits and vegetables — don't forget the protein! — to ensure adequate amounts of Vitamins A, C, E, beta-carotene and zinc, all of which help to protect and regenerate the skin (and thus the scalp and hair). "Food first, always," Feingold-Tishfield says.

Silica is also essential for hair growth, and is found in most seafood, rice, soybeans and whole grains. Supplements such as gamma-linolenic acid, found in black currant oil and evening primrose oil, have been found to enhance the growth of hair, skin and nails, but take about 6 to 8 weeks before you see any results. "There isn't any magic bullet out there," Feingold-Tishfield says.

Control stress_Ever been so stressed you wanted to tear your hair out? There's no need, because your nerves may just beat you to it. "Your body, in times of great stress, conserves energy for your vital organs, and takes it from less important areas, like your scalp," Eidelman says. As a result, you can literally shed your hair like a dog, and it can happen quickly, over a period of just a few months. Be extra aware when you're feeling stressed, and take action — meditation, exercise, listening to music, deep breathing — to restore your equilibrium, before it gets out of hand.

Say no to infomercials_There's almost no end to the infomercials, websites and over-the-counter treatments for hair loss. But don't be fooled by promises of instant regrowth, Eidelman says. "There's a huge industry appealing to people's insecurities out there," he says. "Many of my patients have all bought these treatments and shampoos and then complain when they're not working."

Be bald and proud _There's no shortage of high-profile celebrities and pro athletes who shave their heads and retain their appeal. Use them as role models, or embrace the concept that — hair or no hair — you're in charge of how you feel about yourself. "The magic formula is always acceptance and change," says Greg Cason, Ph.D., a psychotherapist in Los Angeles. "If you can do something to keep your hair, great, but acceptance of who you are is the ultimate solution. People who wear their hair loss proudly tend to do much better and are perceived much more attractively than those who have shame about it. People judge you based on a reflection of how you judge yourself."