

Dr. Susan Mitchell (00:02.774)

You've lost weight, but now you're losing hair and it's scary. Nobody warned you about this part. Well, don't go anywhere. Let's talk about why this hair loss happens. Plus the real steps you can take to get your healthy hair back.

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I'm bariatric dietician, Dr. Susan Mitchell. You're listening to the Bariatric Surgery Success podcast. I'm so glad you're here today. It matters where you get your nutrition information. Here's what you need to know now. Why is my hair falling out in clumps? Where is my hair? What's happening to me? These are some of the comments from my Facebook group. I hear you. I hear you're upset and concerned and for good reason. Okay.

Take a deep breath with me, ready? Breathe in deeply. Hold it 4 seconds. Now breathe out slowly.

Let me put your mind at rest. You're not alone in this. I know that doesn't change the fact that your hair is falling out. 30 to 60 % or more of patients who have bariatric surgery have hair loss three to six months after the surgery. But here's the good news right up front, so don't miss it. This hair loss is very common, not permanent, and your hair should grow back. I know it seems terrifying,

but it's totally normal. Did you grab that? Totally normal to lose five to 15 % of your hair from bariatric surgery and the rapid weight loss that follows. And typically it doesn't last more than six months and then it grows back. With all the changes you're going through, this is a pain in your patoot I know, but it will end. And you might be wondering, why is this hair loss happening?

Well, there's so many causes, starting with surgery itself and the very rapid weight loss. Add to those the stress of going through surgery, potential thyroid issues, extreme diet changes, too little protein, too few calories, hormonal imbalances, even iron and zinc deficiency. Medications like a beta blocker or even too much vitamin A can also play a role in hair loss.

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Okay, so think about your situation with me right now. You've had surgery, your calories very low, there's rapid weight loss, possibly too little protein, maybe an under active thyroid, sprinkle in low levels of iron, zinc, biotin, or folate, and you have a recipe that is not delicious for hair loss. But here's your Science 101 today.

There are four stages in hair growth known as anagen or the growth phase, catagen or the transition phase, telogen or the dormant rest phase, and exogen or hair loss phase. Any guess which phases bariatric hair loss is tied to? You got that right. The telogen or the dormant phase followed by the exogen or the hair loss phase.

It seems that a couple of months after surgery, along with the rapid weight loss and some of the other factors I just mentioned, hair follicles are pushed into this telogen or dormant phase, which typically lasts anywhere from three to six months. And then the exogen phase happens and hair falls out.

Hair loss is more common with gastric bypass and gastric sleeve because you tend to experience a more rapid weight loss and increased chance of vitamin and mineral deficiencies. This physiological stress of surgery and the rapid weight loss can cause your body to focus vitamins and minerals on the heart and the brain and other functions instead of hair growth. So it's very normal. This is when you see

the growth phase end and the telogen or the dormant phase start. Then that exogen phase kicks in causing hair loss to occur. But as your body adjusts to the changes, this hair loss slows and then it stops. Your hair should grow back normally if, and don't miss this if, there are no vitamin and mineral deficiencies.

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and you're consuming adequate protein. So here's where the real steps come into play that you can take to get your healthy hair back. Number one, lab work. This is one of the reasons we dietitians push you to keep up with lab work. If you're concerned about your hair loss and it seems excessive or it's been months, follow up with your healthcare team. Ask for blood work to make sure

There are no underlying health issues such as hypothyroid that would affect hair growth and loss. And at the same time, lab work can check for vitamin and mineral deficiencies such as iron and zinc. Step two, take your bariatric specific vitamin and mineral supplements in the amounts and on the schedule recommended by your bariatric dietitian and your healthcare team.

Bariatric specific supplements should contain iron, zinc, biotin, which you hear so much about, copper and other nutrients tied to healthy hair. Now don't miss this because it comes up often about biotin and other nutrients. If you do not have a deficiency, taking more of these supplements will not make your hair grow back any faster. In fact,

Excessive levels of vitamin A and zinc are potentially harmful. If you're wondering if you take the correct bariatric supplements that your body needs after surgery, go back and listen to episodes 184 and 185. I'll put the links in the show notes or you can easily find them on the website, which is BreakingDownNutrition.com or wherever you just listen to the podcast regularly. Step three.

Food choices, yes. The foods you choose to eat can make a big difference in your hair too. Choosing specific foods that contain say iron or zinc or biotin naturally provide nutrients that your body needs. For example, sweet potatoes, spinach and tomatoes all contain vitamin A.

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Plus spinach is a source of iron and vitamin C. So that makes a really nice trifecta, right? Oysters contain zinc and eggs, guess what they contain? This might surprise you, but eggs are a good source of biotin. Beef contains very absorbable heme iron, while lentils and black beans also contain iron. And when eaten with a vitamin rich food or vitamin C rich food like

red peppers or tomatoes, they help that iron to be absorbed better. So these are just a few foods that you can pick from to give your diet and your hair a boost. All right, I know that you get tired of hearing this. Protein does so much for your post-op body. So this is why you want to be sure you consume 60 to 90 plus grams

of high quality animal soy or dairy based protein and protein powders every single day. Lack of protein causes your hair to become thin and fall out, which you don't need if surgery has already pushed your hair into that dormant stage. So take a few minutes to think about ways to make sure you meet that protein need every day.

Take protein shakes with you or try a jerky like turkey jerky. Prep breakfast or lunch the night before if your day is going to be super busy. One of the things I do every night is look at the next day's calendar and I figure out when I get breaks to eat and what I need to fix so I have something to eat. It takes a little time and planning, but I know myself. And if I don't have something ready, I will want to just grab whatever.

and whatever is usually not a good choice. Are you with me on this one? I hear you. This hair loss isn't fun with all of the other changes you face in your journey, but it will end and sooner than you think. Time has a way of passing by quickly. Here's what I want you to think about this week. So if you're multitasking, come back to me. Focus on you. Take your proper supplements.

Choose foods that provide hair nutrients your body needs. Plan your protein daily and check in with your healthcare team if something seems amiss. You're worth it.