

## ORAL CONTRACEPTIVES & FEMALE HAIRLOSS



### **Oral Contraceptives and Hair Loss In Women :**

When women start losing large amounts of hair, this can undoubtedly cause feelings of panic and stress. One of the most common (and largely unknown) culprits of female hair loss is birth control pills, also known as oral contraceptives. The good news, is that these conditions are generally reversible.

Genes and hormones are two major factors that cause female pattern baldness.

### **Oral Contraceptives and Hair Loss : How Birth Control Pills Work**

Understanding how birth control pills work should start with a general picture of the hormones involved in ovulation and menstruation.

#### **Ovulation**

In ovulation, a matured egg is released from an ovary during each menstrual cycle. At this time, oestrogen levels rise. This causes the lining of the uterus to thicken as a form of preparation for a fertilized egg. Once the egg is released, it travels towards the uterus.

#### **Menstruation**

At the same time as the release, another hormone called progesterone also elevates, preparing the uterus lining for a fertilized egg. If the egg is not fertilized, both estrogen and progesterone drop, causing the uterine lining to shed. This is how menstruation occurs.

### **General Action of Oral Contraceptives**



Oral contraceptives basically consist of oestrogen and progesterone. By supplying these hormones, the levels of oestrogen and progesterone remain consistent. And this prevents the release of an egg through ovulation and the occurrence of menstruation.

#### **Oral Contraceptives and Hair Loss**

Like any drug, oral contraceptives are associated with numerous side effects. Although millions of women are prescribed birth control pills every year, many of them remain quite unaware that they could risk losing their hair.

It is very common for doctors to simply advise that patients review the list of side effects on their own, instead of personally walking them through the entire list.

And it is also a natural tendency for people to focus on the benefits of taking a drug, rather than comparing them against the risk. So very few patients will actually take time outside their doctor's appointment to study the list of side effects for most medications.

Since oral contraceptives basically change the normal hormonal cycles in the body, this can actually cause the hair follicles to experience stress. They will often react by entering a resting mode, called the telogen phase. This is when they stop allocating energy and resources to produce new hair shafts. In a way this can be seen as an attempt to regain balance.

Hair will then fall out to make way for new growth which can be seen about two to three months later.

It would help for female patients to be aware if they are genetically predisposed to pattern baldness/thinning. Birth control pills can potentially exacerbate the rate of hair loss. Again this occurs by creating a hormonal imbalance, by adding androgens to the system. This can create a source of stress for the follicles. And this may cause them to switch from active growth to the resting phase.

Normally, only about 10% of hairs are in resting phase. But the presence of a potential stressor like oral contraceptives can cause a much higher percentage of hairs to enter telogen.

Hair loss is not only a possible consequence of taking birth control pills, but also:

- (1) stopping birth control pills
- (2) changing oral contraceptives

The condition, however, can easily be reversed by stopping the intake of the drug or allowing enough time to adjust to the new changes.

### **Oral Contraceptives and Hair Loss : Paradoxical Hair Growth and Birth Control Pills**

Ironically, it is actually quite possible for oral contraceptives to actually facilitate hair growth. This can occur with birth control pills which have higher levels of oestrogen, compared to progesterone. These drugs will have much greater side effects. So using oral contraceptives to regrow hair in women is generally not recommended.

### **Dangerous Side Effects of Oral Contraceptives**

Many people imagine that drugs work by somehow “knowing” where to go in the body. However, this is not the case. Chemicals will basically travel throughout the circulatory system. And they can basically exert some type of effect on all areas.

While a drug is designed to create a desired response on a particular target region, the same active compound can have an undesired effect on other parts of the body. This is why many medications are accompanied by rather long lists of potential side effects.

Besides hair loss, birth control pills have many other risks. Here are several to be aware of, among others:

- (1) strokes
- (2) heart disease
- (3) blood clots
- (4) infertility
- (5) increased size of fibroids
- (6) hormonal imbalance
- (7) mood swings and depressions
- (8) nutritional deficiencies

Where possible it is recommended to make the effort to research the possibility of using other alternatives that are less toxic, but nonetheless effective. This not only applies for oral contraceptives, but other drugs as well.

### **Addressing Hair Loss In Women**

It would certainly benefit female patients to discuss their hair loss concerns with a trichologist or doctor. The first step to take in treating hair loss in women would be to identify possible causes, whether the factors are related to birth control pills or other factors.

This information is essential to choosing the right intervention. Patients are advised to look for support in the form of research studies as well as testimonies from other individuals that they can relate to.

Besides looking for an active way to address hair loss, it is always recommended that individuals work on adopting healthy, long term life style habits benefit their entire system