

Optum Store

<https://store.optum.com/>

Is it normal to lose your hair after a
COVID-19 infection?



COVID-19 has become a part of life over the past few years. You're no doubt familiar with the typical symptoms: fatigue, fever, runny nose, loss of smell and sore throat. But some people have noticed another side effect that can crop up a few months after they recover from COVID — hair loss.

Losing your hair post-COVID is relatively common, says the American Academy of Dermatology. Some studies show that it can affect more than 20% of people who've been hospitalized with the disease. And you don't need to have had a serious case of COVID to experience hair loss. For some people, it's their only COVID symptom.

Read on to learn what doctors know about COVID and hair loss and what you can do if you experience this unpleasant side effect.

An alarming symptom

At the end of March 2020, thousands of people in New York City contracted COVID-19 — including Marie Leger, MD. She's a board-certified dermatologist and member of the American Academy of Dermatology (AAD) who practices at Entiere Dermatology in New York City.

Dr. Leger recovered. But a few months later, she noticed more hair than usual falling out. Dr. Leger frequently treats hair loss in her patients. Still, the experience threw her. "It was traumatic to see so much hair shedding everywhere," she says.

This form of sudden hair loss is known as telogen effluvium. It can be caused by:

- High fever
- Stress
- Childbirth
- Surgery
- Weight loss

A different kind of hair loss

People lose their hair for a number of reasons. And not all hair loss is the same, explains Michael Horn, MD. He's a plastic surgeon with Lakeshore Plastic Surgery in Chicago, Illinois. Hair loss can be caused by:

Genes (you inherit the condition)

Medication

Overtreating hair with heat tools, and more

Male-pattern or female-pattern baldness is the most common form of hair loss. This genetic disorder is called androgenic alopecia. It causes hair follicles to shrink and lose the ability to grow hair.

Telogen effluvium is different. It doesn't cause long-term damage to the hair follicle. That means your hair can (and in most cases will) grow back.

Learn more about the difference between natural shedding and actual hair loss.

So what exactly happens? In a normal hair growth cycle, we all shed hair from our scalp every day. Roughly 10% of your hair is in the shedding (or telogen) phase at any given time. The other 90% is in the growth (anagen) phase.

When you have telogen effluvium, 25% to 50% of hair can enter the telogen phase all at once. This leads to a very noticeable increase in hair loss.

"It looks like lots of hair in the shower, on the pillow in the morning, all over the house," says Dr. Leger. It can be distressing. But telogen effluvium usually gets better by itself. "That can take up to 6 to 12 months," says Dr. Leger.

COVID and hair loss

Dr. Leger remembers that as she started to see her own hair fall out post-COVID, a high number of her patients were noticing the same thing. "I saw dozens of patients come in with hair loss who either reported having COVID, or when we tested them for COVID antibodies, they were positive."

Other dermatology departments in the area reported an increase of more than 400% in telogen effluvium cases.

Experts aren't sure of the causal link between COVID and hair loss. But it's known that fever and stress can be triggers. "When the body is put through a high fever or significant stress, telogen effluvium could send a signal to a portion of the hair to enter its resting phase," says Dr. Horn. "Then it begins to shed in patches of the scalp."

Hair loss typically occurs 2 or 3 months after a patient recovers from COVID, says the AAD.

Treatment options

Shedding a lot of hair after a COVID infection can stress you out. But try to relax because stress can make the shedding worse, says the AAD. Practice mindfulness, do yoga or try deep breathing techniques. Remind yourself that COVID-related hair loss should resolve on its own.

If you don't notice any regrowth after about 6 months, you have a few options:

Minoxidil (Rogaine® , Theroxidil and other versions) is a topical solution. It's available either over the counter or as a prescription. It may help stimulate hair growth for those with telogen effluvium.

Platelet-rich plasma (PRP) may also work to speed up recovery, says Dr. Leger. This treatment uses your own blood cells to help healing.

Your doctor may suggest switching any medications that could be contributing to hair loss, says Dr. Horn. Corticosteroid injections to stimulate hair growth are another option.

Bottom line: If you notice hair loss after you've recovered from COVID, don't panic. It's a good idea to make an appointment with a dermatologist. The specialist can determine whether you have telogen effluvium or another issue that may need a separate treatment.

<https://store.optum.com/blog/article/conditions/it-normal-lose-your-hair-after-covid-19-infection/>