

How to Determine if Hair Replacement is Right for You

By Curt Hagedorn

Do you need hair replacement? It's easy to say that nobody really "needs" hair replacement, the way nobody really "needs" elective plastic surgery – that it's all a matter of vanity. Unfortunately, in today's competitive work and social environments – and youth obsessed culture – if you're not the kind of guy who can, fortunately, pull off bald, you may actually need some sort of hair replacement plan in order to maintain, if not your position in the world, at least your sense of self. If you can make peace with yourself without hair, you're going to some time and money, but if you can't, there are things that the estimated 50 million of you out there with male-pattern baldness can do that either are natural or look natural.

- a) **Toupees (wigs) and weaves.** One of the most heavily advertised ways of dealing with hair loss (does "Hair Club" sound familiar) is integrating other hair, either by a wig which sits on top of your head or a subtle weaving together of your own hair with other hair...natural or synthetic. Even people blessed with a healthy head of hair often have hair weaves or "extensions" to get longer hair for a particular style from long and silky to dreadlocks and braids. If you're thinking about any other kind of hair replacement, this is a good stopgap measure, particularly if baldness or a receding hairline is just becoming noticeable. A good weave can cost a few hundred dollars and will last a couple of months depending upon how active you are. Though people still wear actual wigs or toupees and the technology has become quite realistic, most people, if they have any hair at all, prefer a weave for its more natural feel and look. Wigs and weaves are also excellent solutions in combination with hair replacement surgery during the period where you're waiting for new hair to grow in.

- b) **Hair replacement surgery.** Like all surgery, hair replacement is not to be entered into lightly, though like other forms of hair replacement, it has grown in sophistication and safety over the last twenty years. Gone are the "hair plugs" that brought to mind doll heads more than natural human hair. Hair transplants now consist of follicular units or FUTs, very small "bunches" of hair that looks exactly like natural hair growth. Basically, a strip of skin and hair is removed from a "donor area" and then this strip is divided into FUTs of whatever size is deemed necessary. These FUT's are inserted into small incisions in the scalp, where they basically heal over. New hair usually begins to appear in three to six months time.

- c) **Drugs.** There are a couple of major drugs for the treatment of hair loss – each was discovered in the process of using the drugs to treat other ailments. Finasteride, more commonly known as Propecia, is taken orally and Minoxidil, more commonly known as Rogaine, is administered topically. Another drug, Dutasteride, is also sometimes prescribed for male pattern baldness and is related to Finasteride in that it was primarily developed as a treatment for prostate cancer. Some side effects of oral medication include a variety of sexual problems as well as gynomastia. Topical medication like Rogaine comes in varying strengths from 2% to 5% solution and must be applied twice daily. If you're just beginning to notice thinning hair, either of these solutions can be a good choice, but also represent an ongoing financial investment in maintaining your healthy head of hair – if the drug stops, so does your renewed hair growth.
- d) **Scams.** Human beings have a touching faith – and seemingly an endless supply of rose-colored glasses – when it comes to things that claim to improve their appearance. While you may be desperate for a hair replacement solution, remember it takes time, research and a certain investment in quality treatment whether that is from a hairdresser or a doctor. Buying pills over the Internet, which claim to have the effects of Propecia or to BE a variety of Finasteride or Dutasteride without a prescription, is both illegal and dangerous. And sprays and creams which pretend to either grow hair or “fool” people into thinking you have hair – well, remember they've been selling this kind of thing for years and have you ever seen anyone in real life say they worked? Follow the old rule of “if it seems too good to be true, it probably is.”