

Types of treatment

Dermatologists say there are two hair-loss treatments available here that are approved by the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

MINOXIDIL

Pharmacy only

How it works: This is a clear liquid that needs to be applied to the scalp twice a day.

Effect: It is said to stabilise hair loss in about 70 per cent of patients and stimulate growth in about 40 per cent of cases. The downside is that it might take six to 12 months before you see results. Also, side effects include an itchy scalp and some hair growth on the forehead. These wear off two to three months after you stop using it.

Cost: \$40 to \$80 per month

FINASTERIDE

Prescription only

How it works: It is available in pill form and is only for men. It is a drug used to treat enlarged prostate. Because it reduces DHT levels in the blood, a side effect was hair growth. It was then used to treat hair loss.

Effect: It slows down hair loss in 90 per cent of patients and stimulates hair growth in about 60 per cent of them. The downside is that it does not work for men with hair loss at the temples or those who are completely bald. Side effects include decreased libido, erectile dysfunction or ejaculation disorder. The effect wears off about six to 12 months after you stop taking it.

Cost: About \$90 per month

OTHER OPTIONS

Non-medication options include wigs, hair weaves and

hair transplants. The transplant is a major procedure where small strips of hair-bearing scalp are removed from the back and sides of the head. These harvested strips are then divided into grafts for placement in the balding areas. Because this hair is DHT resistant, it will not fall out. The procedure can be done by only a trained dermatologist or plastic surgeon. It can be quite expensive, ranging from \$4,000 to \$7,000.

ElectroTrichoGenesis (ETG): This is the newest kid on the hair loss treatment block. It is administered by the Electro Hair Regeneration (EHR) Centre at the Camden Medical Centre here.

In theory, the treatment stimulates hair follicles by exposing them to an electrostatic field. It was derived from electromedicine, which was initially used some 30 years ago to speed up bone healing but had the side effect of promoting hair growth. There are some scientific studies backing the effectiveness of ETG as a treatment for male pattern baldness as well as hair loss in women who are undergoing chemotherapy. The appeal is that it takes only 12 minutes of your time each week and there are no known side effects.

Dr Eugene Hong, director of EHR Centre, said the treatment has a 96.7 per cent success rate for all patients. The downside is that it can be expensive at \$80 to \$175 per sitting and it takes about 36 weeks of treatment to see effects, though hair loss may stop as early as 12 weeks. The therapy is used in Canada but is not yet approved by the FDA.