



Minoxidil for hair loss

This leaflet provides information about treatment for pattern hair loss which has the medical name ‘androgenic alopecia’.

What is pattern hair loss?

Androgenetic alopecia is the most common type of hair loss and can affect both men and women – male pattern hair loss and female pattern hair loss.

It is known as pattern hair loss because there is a distinctive pattern of hair loss that people with these conditions experience.

In men, hair loss usually begins above the temples causing a receding hairline. This hair loss then progresses at the top of the head, leading to increasingly thin hair and often to significant baldness.

In women, androgenetic alopecia begins with gradual thinning at the centre parting at the top of the head, followed by increasing scattered hair loss/thinning across the entire scalp. Women with female pattern hair loss rarely go completely bald.

It is the most common type of hair loss, affecting approximately 50% of men over the age of 50 years and around 50% of women over the age of 65 years. Androgenetic alopecia can also affect younger men and women. Whatever the gender or age of the person experiencing pattern hair loss, it can significantly impact a person's psychological wellbeing and self-esteem.

What is the treatment for pattern hair loss?

There are things you can try if your hair loss is causing you distress. But not all treatments are available on the NHS, so you may have to pay but it is important to know that no treatment is 100% effective. Visit <https://www.nhs.uk/symptoms/hair-loss/> for more information.

Finasteride and minoxidil are the main treatments for male pattern baldness.

Minoxidil is also used to treat female pattern baldness. **Women should not use finasteride.**

This leaflet outlines treatment using Minoxidil only.

What is minoxidil treatment?

Minoxidil can be given either in tablet form or applied as a topical (on the skin) solution.

Minoxidil is a tablet originally used in larger doses to treat high blood pressure. In smaller doses, swallowed (orally), it has been found to increase the blood flow to the hair roots. This then enables hairs to grow for longer and new hair starts to grow more quickly.

Minoxidil solution has been used successfully in treating people with hair loss for a variety of reasons, such as:

- People who have finished chemotherapy treatments which caused hair loss.
- **Male and female pattern hair loss.**
- Fragile hair disorders.

Which minoxidil treatment will I be given?

Before any treatment you will be assessed by a member of the hair specialist team. They will decide the treatment plan with you, and the dose needed.

While you are receiving oral minoxidil treatment, you should have your pulse and blood pressure monitored regularly by your GP.

Oral minoxidil is available as a 2.5 milligrams (mg) tablet. At lower doses it can still stimulate hair growth but side effects are kept to a minimum.

Oral minoxidil doses vary between 0.625mg up to 2.5mg. To achieve the dose of 0.625mg, you are required to use a pill cutter, cutting the tablet into quarters. You will start on a 0.625mg dose every other day; any further changes to the dose will be discussed in your follow up consultations.

Minoxidil foam (Regain®) is the only licenced treatment for female and male pattern hair loss. This is a topical solution (applied to the skin) and can be bought over the counter.

How long does it need to be taken for?

Minoxidil can take up to 6 months to work and only works for as long as you use/take it.

Possible side effects of minoxidil

When starting minoxidil some people experience an increase in hair shedding. This usually settles within the first 6 weeks of treatment. This is an expected effect of the medication and serves to resynchronise the hairs into a growth cycle.

Minoxidil is generally well tolerated and most people experience no side effects so it is unlikely that you will experience any side effects on the low dose minoxidil. However, on higher doses of minoxidil, the following side-effects have been experienced:

- Fluid retention (causing weight gain and/or ankle swelling)
- Increased heart rate and palpitations
- Chest pain and/or shortness of breath
- Low blood pressure causing dizziness and fainting
- Increased face and body hair growth
- Skin rashes
- Nausea and vomiting
- Breast tenderness

Important points to consider

When starting minoxidil, some people experience an increase in the hair shedding cycle. This usually settles within the first 6 weeks of treatment.

This treatment is not advised for individuals who are already on medication to reduce their blood pressure (anti-hypertensive medication).

Because alcohol lowers the blood pressure, we recommend that you reduce any alcohol intake during oral minoxidil treatment.

Currently, there is no evidence to confirm that minoxidil is safe to use if you are trying to conceive, are pregnant or are breastfeeding. For this reason, minoxidil is **not** recommended for women in this group.

As with all medication, we recommend that you read the patient information leaflet enclosed in the packet.

Adapted from a Gloucestershire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust leaflet.

To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

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Next review due: October 2027.