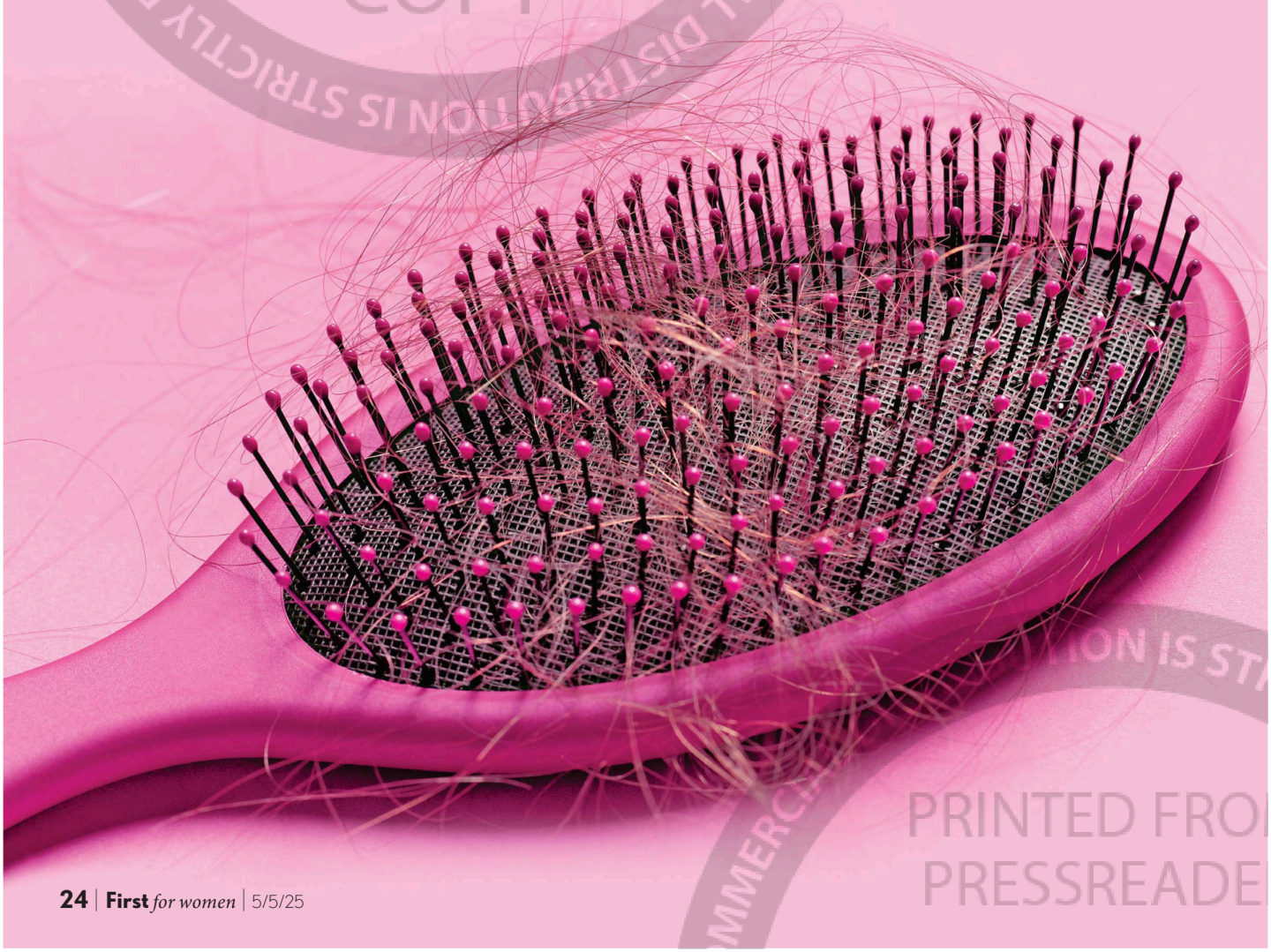
- Weight loss

HELP FOR A SURPRISE SIDE EFFECT OF WEIGHT LOSS

You found a weight-loss method that works for you: The pounds are coming off, your clothes fit better and you're feeling more confident. But many women notice an unexpected and unflattering change: hair loss. Here, how to reverse it

BY DANIELLE SCHLASS SALIMAN

IT'S SO UNFAIR. "When patients lose a significant amount of weight, especially quickly, it can trigger a type of hair shedding called telogen effluvium," says Ross Kopelman, D.O., a hair transplant surgeon at Kopelman Hair Restoration. "I see this all the time in my practice." It's a common concern, especially for women, and understanding the connection is key to addressing it effectively. Read on to learn about the link between weight loss and hair loss and how you can easily reverse thinning while staying lean.



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The connection between hair loss and weight

Rapid weight loss acts as a shock to the system, explains Dr. Kopelman. This sudden change forces more hair follicles into the resting (telogen) phase of the hair cycle. These resting hairs then begin to shed a few months down the line—often dramatically.

But, Dr. Kopelman assures, while short-term rapid weight loss can cause hair shedding, "I tell my patients not to panic because in the long run, sustainable weight loss can actually help *improve* hair health—especially for people with conditions like polycystic ovarian syndrome, insulin resistance or metabolic syndrome." These conditions can contribute to hair thinning due to hormonal imbalances—particularly elevated insulin and androgens.

He explains that when someone loses weight in a controlled, healthy way—especially with GLP-1 medications like Ozempic, which help regulate insulin—their overall hormonal profile improves. In some cases, hair loss related to these metabolic issues actually slows or even reverses. "While the initial shedding can be frustrating, I remind my patients that achieving a healthy, balanced weight can ultimately lead to better scalp and hair health."

Nutrient deficiencies also play a significant role. "Hair is a non-essential tissue," Dr. Kopelman emphasizes. Your body prioritizes essential functions, and when it's deprived of vital nutrients like protein, iron and key vitamins, hair growth takes a backseat. "Hair health reflects overall health," he adds, "so if your body is under strain from extreme weight loss, your hair is likely to suffer."

Certain weight-loss methods are more likely to trigger hair loss, says Dr. Kopelman, who points to crash diets, bariatric surgery and very low-calorie diets as the biggest culprits. "When you suddenly cut calories or undergo major metabolic changes, your body shifts into survival mode."

Important to note: While the recent popularity of GLP-1 medications has raised concerns about hair loss, Dr. Kopelman clarifies, "It's usually not the medication itself causing shedding—it's the rapid weight loss that comes with it."

Good news! "Telogen effluvium is usually temporary," attests Dr. Kopelman. In most cases, it will resolve once the body stabilizes at a new, healthy weight, with most people seeing regrowth within three to six months. (Full recovery takes up to a year.) However, underlying deficiencies, hormonal imbalances or genetic predispositions can affect the recovery process. "That's why I take a personalized approach, making sure we're addressing the root cause of the shedding," he explains.'

4 easy ways to regrow hair

"The sooner we address the issue, the better the outcome," says Dr. Kopelman. Here are some simple at-home solutions for thinning hair—whether it's caused by weight loss or something else.

1 Try a 5% minoxidil treatment The over-the-counter treatment better known as Rogaine is clinically proven to help restart the hair cycle and help women regrow their hair. Apply to the scalp once daily. You can also take it orally: One clinical trial found that 80% of participants who did so noticed thicker hair within three to six weeks of starting the medication. Tip: Buy the product labeled for men—it's the same formula as the women's product but costs 27% less per dose.

2 Try some TLC Studies show scalp massage can increase hair thickness and may even help alopecia sufferers regrow hair. And adding growth-inducing ingredients like rosemary oil can boost the benefits. Indeed, one study found that rosemary oil was as effective as minoxidil in regrowing hair. To do: Add 5 to 10 drops of rosemary oil to a carrier oil, then use your fingers to massage the scalp in small, circular motions starting at the hairline and moving back. Repeat nightly.

3 Reach for sandalwood British scientists report that when applied to the scalp, the woodsy aroma of sandalwood boosts hair-growth hormones in follicles by 30%. That's because hair follicles contain the same receptors responsible for our sense of smell—the oil's aroma stimulates these receptors and promotes new growth. To do: Mix 4 drops of sandalwood essential oil and 2 Tbs. of olive oil. Rub on scalp and damp hair. Let sit for 20 minutes; rinse.

4 Give your hair a little tug Taking 2 minutes a day to gently pull on your hair activates genes that encourage hair growth, increasing the diameter of each strand by 8%. One study found that doing so leads to a noticeable boost in thickness in four months.

45% Number of women who say hair thinning affects their confidence

55% Number of women who experience thinning hair by age 70

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