

Men's Health Halting Hair Loss

In Pictures: Best Baldness Busters

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Laser Comb

In January, the Food and Drug Administration gave clearance for the HairMax LaserComb as a treatment that promotes hair growth for men. The device uses the energy of a laser to improve the appearance of hair and claims to reduce hair loss. Treatment involves passing a curling iron-sized comb through the hair for 10 minutes, three times a week.

Courtesy of Lexington International LLC

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[Allison Van Dusen](#), 06.18.07, 12:00 AM ET

Luke Turowski wasn't ready to go bald yet.

The 25-year-old, who co-owns a construction business with his father in Michigan, guessed it might happen to him one day given his family history--just not at the age of 20.

Turowski tried shaving his head for a couple of years. But he didn't like the idea of wearing the look in his wedding pictures some day. When he finally let his locks grow again, he decided to do something.

"To me, going bald is aging," he says.

Whether it's a matter of wanting to look young, feel confident or simply have a woman run her fingers through it, many men will go to great lengths to avoid losing their hair.

In a survey of 2,338 men by the International Society of Hair Restoration Surgery, more than 1,300 said they'd be willing to give up a personal possession in exchange for more hair. Of that group, 26% said they'd be willing to give up a stereo system, 21% a cellphone, 17% a laptop and 13% a plasma TV.

It's estimated that the U.S. market for hair restoration procedures in 2004 was about \$811 million, the vast majority of which was for male patients, according to the ISHRS.

Dr. Jeffrey Epstein, of the Foundation for Hair Restoration, says men unhappy with their receding hair lines basically have two options. They can shave their heads, a la Bruce Willis--a style that makes a statement but takes guts. Or they can seek treatment.

"People that lose their hair are viewed as less powerful and more suspicious," says Epstein, who has surgical and consultation offices in South Florida and New York. "It's also seen as a measure of virility."

The First Step

While androgenetic alopecia, a genetically determined condition that spurs balding, affects roughly 50% of men internationally, it's not the only cause. Before you start trolling the Internet for quick fixes, head to the dermatologist's office to rule out underlying medical problems, suggests Dr. Gene Rubinstein, a clinical instructor at UCLA, who is in private practice at the Dermatology and Laser Centre of Studio City, Calif.

A dermatologist can help you figure out if medications, such as [menoxidil](#), aka Rogaine, or prescription-only [propecia](#), are smart choices. The only two drugs approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration for treating hair loss, both have been shown as effective in preventing hair loss for as long as they're used and can be taken simultaneously for potentially better results. They can also promote regrowth of hair, albeit typically thin hair, Rubinstein says.

Earlier this year, the FDA also gave clearance to a handheld home medical device called the [HairMax LaserComb](#), which uses a laser's energy to promote hair regrowth. It sells for \$395 to \$545.

But since men may not want to take a pill every day for the rest of their lives or regularly use a comb, many turn to hair transplantation, says London and New York-based plastic surgeon Dr. Laurence Kirwan.

Top Techniques

[Follicular unit grafting](#) is considered the gold standard in hair transplantation techniques, according to Epstein. While a decade ago doctors took large grafts of hair--known as plugs--from the back of a patient's head and transplanted them to the crown, follicular unit grafting takes hairs in groups of one to four. Procedures may take several hours and cost upwards of \$10,000. But patients end up with smaller donor site scars and, more important, doctors can recreate a permanent, natural-looking hair line.

Turowski has had two of the grafting procedures, giving him a look he says makes him feel "more approachable."

As for upcoming advances, one technique doctors have high hopes for in the future is [hair cloning](#). Currently being researched by a handful of companies, the process is many years from hitting the market. Bosley Medical is looking to make it work by extracting cells from the areas of a man's head that resist balding, putting them in a lab dish and multiplying them by the thousands. The hope is that once the new cells are injected back into the scalp, they'll work with skin cells to form new follicles, says Dr. Ken Washenik, medical director of Bosley. Unlike with transplants, the patient could end up with more hairs overall.

Don't Buy The Snake Oil

If you're confused about what to do and looking for unbiased information, consider the [Hair Foundation](#). A new independent, nonprofit group, it presents facts about hair care, hair loss and hair replacement techniques.

"There are so many plain old false claims," says Dr. Tony Mangubat, the foundation's current president and founder of Seattle's Southcenter Cosmetic Surgery and Hair Restoration. "The history of this is life-long. We wanted to set up a method to cut through myths and get to the truth."

While men have options when it comes to treatments, they don't always work for everyone and some, Rubinstein says, have been touted a little too highly.

"If there were truly a cure, there would be no bald dermatologists," he says.