

## Hair Transplants: What to Expect



Like good health and youth, most of us take our locks for granted -- that is, until they're gone. For many people, a hair transplant can help bring back what looks like a full -- or at least a fuller -- head of hair.

If thinning up top or going bald really bothers you, the procedure can be one way to feel more confident about your looks. But first talk with your doctor about what you can expect during and after the surgery.

### **What Is a Hair Transplant?**

It's a type of surgery that moves hair you already have to fill an area with thin or no hair. Doctors have been doing these transplants in the U.S. since the 1950s, but techniques have changed a lot in recent years.

You usually have the procedure in the doctor's office. First, the surgeon cleans your scalp and injects medicine to numb the back of your head. Your doctor will choose one of two methods for the transplant: follicular unit strip surgery (FUSS) or follicular unit extraction (FUE).

With FUSS, the surgeon removes a 6- to 10-inch strip of skin from the back of your head. He sets it aside and sews the scalp closed. This area is immediately hidden by the hair around it.

Next, the surgeon's team divides the strip of removed scalp into 500 to 2,000 tiny grafts, each with an individual hair or just a few hairs. The number and type of graft you get depends on your hair type, quality, color, and the size of the area where you're getting the transplant.

If you're getting the FUE procedure, the surgeon's team will shave the back of your scalp. Then, the doctor will remove hair follicles one by one from there. The area heals with small dots, which your existing hair will cover.

After that point, both procedures are the same. After he prepares the grafts, the surgeon cleans and numbs the area where the hair will go, creates holes or slits with a scalpel or needle, and delicately places each graft in one of the holes. He'll probably get help from other team members to plant the grafts, too.

Depending on the size of the transplant you're getting, the process will take about 4 to 8 hours. You might need another procedure later on if you continue to lose hair or decide you want thicker hair.

## **Expectations and Recovery**

After the surgery, your scalp may be very tender. You may need to take pain medications for several days. Your surgeon will have you wear bandages over your scalp for at least a day or two. He may also prescribe an antibiotic or an anti-inflammatory drug for you to take for several days. Most people are able to return to work 2 to 5 days after the operation.

Within 2 to 3 weeks after surgery, the transplanted hair will fall out, but you should start to notice new growth within a few months. Most people will see 60% of new hair growth after 6 to 9 months. Some surgeons prescribe the hair-growing drug minoxidil (Rogaine) to improve hair growth after transplantation, but it's not clear how well it works.

## **How much do hair transplants cost?**

Hair transplants can range from about \$4,000 to \$15,000 per session.

Final costs may depend on the:

- extent of the transplant procedure
- availability of surgeons in your area
- experience of the surgeon
- surgical technique chosen

Because hair transplants are cosmetic procedures, health insurance won't pay for the procedure.

Aftercare medications may also add to the final cost.

## **Hair transplant side effects**

The most common side effect is scarring, and this cannot be avoided with any procedure.

Other potential side effects include:

- infections
- crust or pus drainage around the surgical sites

- scalp pain, itching, and swelling
- inflammation of hair follicles (folliculitis)
- bleeding
- losing sensation around the surgical sites
- visible areas of hair that don't match the surrounding hair or are noticeably thinner
- continuing to lose hair if your hair is still balding

Minoxidil and Propecia can also have side effects, such as:

- irritated scalp
- dizziness
- chest pain
- headaches
- irregular heart rate
- hand, foot, or breast swelling