

Telogen Effluvium (Shedding Hair Loss)

Telogen effluvium (TE) occurs when there is a marked increase in hairs shed each day. It is normal to shed approximately 30-150 hairs from our scalp daily as part of our hair cycle, but this can vary depending on washing and brushing routines. Hair regrows automatically so that the total number of hairs on our head normally remains constant. In TE, an increased proportion of hairs shift from the growing phase (anagen) to the shedding phase (telogen). Normally only 10% of the scalp hair is in the telogen phase, but in telogen effluvium this increases to 30% or more. TE usually happens suddenly and can occur approximately 2-3 months after a trigger. Common triggers of telogen effluvium include pregnancy, childbirth, severe illness, a stressful or major life event (such as losing a loved one), weight loss, dieting, diet change, a new medication, or hormone changes, or cause may be unknown in 1/3 of cases.

Telogen effluvium is diagnosed based on the history of the hair shedding and by physical exam. Very rarely a skin biopsy may be required. There are many other causes of hair thinning including female pattern balding type hair loss (androgenetic alopecia) which may also present in a similar fashion to telogen effluvium and sometimes these conditions overlap. A blood test may be suggested to rule out other causes of hair loss, such as underactive thyroid and low serum ferritin (blood iron binding protein).

Telogen effluvium usually resolves completely without any intervention as the normal length of telogen is approximately 100 days (3 to 6 months) after which period the hair starts growing again. However depending on the length of the hair, it may take many months for the overall hair volume to gradually return to normal. TE can also return, especially if the underlying cause is not treated or recurs.

Hair styling such as perms, color, and shampoos, do not affect the progress or outcome of telogen effluvium. The use of a wig or hair extensions may help camouflage the hair thinning and also will not hurt the normal hair regrowth.

Treatment is not usually required for telogen effluvium as the hair will start growing by itself once the trigger is removed. Medication does not speed up this process but some supplements may help strengthen and thicken hair. Supplements are all over the counter and available at local pharmacies or online:

1. Biotin (Hair Skin and Nails brand) 2-5mg (2000-5000mcg) orally daily
2. Viviscal (marine extract) twice daily for 2 months and then once daily
3. Minoxidil 5% ("unscented foam for men") topically once daily
4. If ferritin is less than 80ng/ml by blood test, then elemental iron supplementation like Vitron-C 65mg twice a day for 2-3 months, then recheck blood ferritin level (only take if directed by provider). Iron pills can change the color of your stool to a greenish or grayish black. This is normal, but because internal bleeding can also cause dark stool, be sure to mention any color changes to your doctor.

For more information on Telogen Effluvium please visit:
<https://www.dermnetz.org/topics/telogen-effluvium/>