How Do I Treat Hair Loss

Few dermatologic problems carry as much emotional overtones as the complaint of hair loss. The best way to alleviate the emotional distress related to hair loss is to effectively treat it. As with any medical problem, the patient complaining of hair loss requires a comprehensive medical and drug history, physical examination of the hair and scalp, and appropriate laboratory evaluation to identify the cause. Non-scarring alopecia underlies the complaint of hair loss in the majority of cases, and include: androgenetic alopecia, telogen effluvium, alopecia areata, and trichotillomania. The scarring alopecias comprise a minority of cases, but demand special attention because of irreversibility of a cosmetic potentially disturbing defect and the possibility of an underlying potentially serious medical condition, such as lupus erythematosus, sarcoidosis, or neoplastic disease. Prerequisite for delivering appropriate therapy of hair loss is an understanding of the underlying pathologic dynamics. Once the diagnosis is certain, therapy appropriate for that diagnosis is likely to control the problem. Evidence-based medicine (EBM) aims to apply the best available evidence gained from the scientific method to clinical decision making, however there are limitations of its use. The limited success of evidence based therapies points to a more important complexity of hair loss. Moreover, EBM guidelines do not remove the problem of extrapolation to different patient populations or longer timeframes, and certain groups have been under-researched, such as people with co-morbid diseases. Finally, EBM applies to groups of people, but this does not preclude clinicians from using their personal experience in deciding what is best for the individual at hand. Good medical practice means integrating personal clinical expertise with the best available external clinical evidence from EBM. By approaching the hair loss patient in a methodical way, commencing with objects the simplest and easiest to recognize, and ascending step by step to the knowledge of the more complex, an individualized treatment plan can be designed. One must remain open-minded for the possibility of a multitude of cause-relationships underlying hair loss, and consequently consider combination regimens for therapy that may act synergistic to enhance hair growth and quality. Ultimately, treatment success relies on patient compliance. Patients need to be educated about the basics of the hair cycle, and why patience is required for effective cosmetic recovery. Finally, the influence of the prescribing physician should be kept in mind, since inspiring confidence versus scepticism and anxiety impacts the outcome of therapy.

References