About Hair Transplantation

About the Procedure
Hair transplantation is the surgical movement of hair to an area of bald or balding skin. If hair is taken from an area of scalp that is not expected to lose hair over time, the transplanted hair is expected to grow permanently, even if it is moved to an area that is bald or balding. In most cases of hereditary thinning, there is a “permanent” fringe of hair along the sides and back of the scalp that provides the source of hair for the transplant.

How is the procedure done?
Hair transplantation is done as an outpatient procedure. The procedure usually takes about 4 to 8 hours.

1. Hair and follicles are removed surgically from the "donor area" of permanent hair along the back and sides of the head.
2. The donor area is then stitched together and is immediately camouflaged by the surrounding hair.
3. The removed hair follicles are then divided into individual grafts of varying sizes by a team of hair transplant technicians.
4. The number and size of graft is made taking into account your hair type, quality, color, and the area to be transplanted.
5. The surgeon will then place small incisions in the area to be transplanted.
6. Once prepared, the grafts (hair and its roots) are then inserted into these incisions.
More than 1 session may be needed for best results. The timing and number of transplants depends on the amount of hair you have when you start, how much ongoing hair loss you continue to have and how much hair density you desire.

In most cases, right after the hair transplant, the hairs fall out of the grafts, and do not regrow for at least 1 to 3 months. After this, they begin to grow as normal hair. With each session there is more hair, and the resulting appearance is thicker hair. The final result from any one session is not completely apparent until 1 year after the transplant.

**What medicines will be used?**

Hair transplantation is done under local anesthesia.

**Benefits**

You might receive the following benefits from this procedure. Doctors cannot guarantee you will receive any of these benefits. Only you can decide if the benefits are worth the risks.

1. Hair transplantation is designed to add hair to an area of thinning or baldness. It is not possible to reproduce the original thickness of hair in an area, but even some additional hair can make a big difference in appearance and styling options. Unlike in the past where “plugs” were used, newer techniques used here should make the grafts virtually undetectable.

2. The hair is your own. Just like all of your hair it grows and can be washed, curled, cleaned, permed, and styled as desired. Once the transplants are completed, no special maintenance is required.

**What are the possible risks and complications from this procedure?**

Before you have this procedure, you need to understand the associated risks. No procedure is completely risk-free. The following risks are well-recognized, but there may also be risks not included in this list that are unforeseen by your doctors. Steps are taken during the procedure to lower the chances of having a complication.

1. General risks, which apply to all types of surgery and to "invasive procedures" (procedures where a blood vessel, body cavity, or other internal tissue is entered with a needle, tube, or similar device). These risks, which can be serious and even life-threatening, include bleeding, infection, and damage to surrounding tissues, vessels, nerves, or organs.
2. The site from where the hair is taken is usually a fine scar line, which is hidden by the permanent hair in that area. If you shave your head, however, the scar will be visible. Uncommonly, the scar may be wider than desired.

3. After the procedure, there are tiny marks where the grafts have been placed.

4. Bleeding.

5. Swelling, often about 2 to 6 days after surgery.


7. Crusting at recipient site for about 1 to 2 weeks.

Less common or rare complications:

1. Unsightly scar in donor area.

2. Poor growth of grafts

3. Folliculitis (ingrown hair) in some grafts.

4. Ongoing hair loss in the area, reducing the visible benefit of the transplant.

5. Ongoing hair loss in the area, creating an unnatural pattern of hair growth.

6. Temporary shedding (telogen) of the existing hair induced by the transplant. This may take months to regrow and can rarely be permanent. This complication is more common in women. If this happens, it can lead to visibly thinner hair in the postoperative period since the grafts take a few months to grow.

7. Some scalp numbness or tingling.

8. Infection.

9. Risks of local anesthesia and sedation are extremely rare, but include possible serious damage to vital organs resulting in paralysis, cardiac arrest, and/or brain death.

Cautions

1. Although some hair added through transplantation can make a big difference, one cannot reproduce the original density of hair with transplantation.

2. Progressive hair loss from the original condition will reduce the visible benefit of the transplant and may be a reason to have more transplanting done in the future.
More sessions may be required depending on the desired final density, ongoing hair loss, and available hair to transplant.

4. Because the donor site supply is limited, one cannot transplant large areas densely – usually key areas of thinning/baldness are targeted.

5. It takes about 10 to 12 months to assess the final outcome.

**What are the alternatives to this procedure?**

You may decide not to have this procedure. Besides doing nothing, the recognized alternative treatments are:

1. Drugs such as Propecia or Rogaine
2. Wigs
3. Weaves
4. Camouflage make-up
5. Other surgery such as scalp reduction or flaps

**What follow-up care is needed?**

See our handout, “After Hair Transplantation Surgery” for care instructions after surgery.

If you have any further questions about this procedure or the risks, benefits, or alternatives to this procedure, ask your doctor before signing any consent forms.