Hair loss, or *alopecia*, is a very common problem for both women and men. The most common form of this is male-pattern baldness, or *androgenetic alopecia*, in which a man’s hairline recedes along the temples, and sometime the top of the scalp as well.

Almost 50% of men (50 out of 100) have male pattern baldness, and 33% of women (33 out of 100) also have hair loss at some point. Even though it is common, it can be socially and emotionally distressing to lose your hair, especially if the cause is unknown.

**Causes of Hair Loss**

There are many different causes of hair loss. Hair is one of the fastest growing tissues in the body, so it is very sensitive to many different types of physical and emotional stress.

To help determine the cause of your hair loss, your doctor may advise:

- **A biopsy of your scalp and hair.** In a biopsy, a small sample of your scalp and hair will be tested in the lab. The biopsy will show if there is scarring and if the skin and hair follicles are inflamed.

- **Blood tests to look for certain medical conditions.** Many of these are easily treated.

- **Reviewing your current medicines.** Many medicines have been linked to hair loss. There are some that are more likely to cause this problem, such as anti-seizure medicines, beta-blockers, thyroid medicines, and blood thinners. Retinoid medicines such as Acitretin (used to treat psoriasis and other skin conditions) and Isotretinoin (used to treat a type of severe acne and other skin conditions) have also been linked to hair loss.

Most people with hair loss have normal test results. Usually, this means they have either *androgenetic* (male-pattern or female-pattern) hair loss, or *telogen effluvium*.

**Telogen Effluvium**

Normally, every hair on your scalp grows for about 36 months before it enters a 3-month resting phase, called *telogen*. At the end of this phase, a new hair starts to grow and pushes out the old one. Since
Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns. UWMC clinic staff are also available to help.

Dermatology Center: 206-598-5065

Telogen effluvium is one of the most common causes of hair loss in women. It most often occurs around childbirth, but it can occur at other times as well.

**Telogen Effluvium in New Mothers**

At the time of giving birth, many hairs go into the 3-month long telogen resting phase, all at the same time. At the end of those 3 months, the new hairs start to grow, and the result is major hair loss (*effluvium*). It is important to remember that this occurs because the new hairs are actually growing back!

While this type of hair loss can be dramatic, by the time it is noticed the process to return to normal has already started.

**Telogen Effluvium Caused by Stress**

Telogen effluvium also commonly occurs as a result of many other physical and emotional stresses.

Sometimes, stressful events or illnesses that occur more than once can make the process repeat. This makes it seem that the hair loss is getting worse or becoming chronic (long-term). But, usually the changes are not permanent, and the hair will grow back.

**Myths About Hair Loss**

These are 2 common myths about the cause of hair loss:

- “If my hair falls out I have cancer.” Not true! Many drugs used to treat cancer can cause hair loss, but cancer itself does not cause hair loss.

- “I’m not taking the right vitamins.” This is probably not true. Vitamin deficiencies (not getting enough vitamins) are very rare in the U.S.
  - Your doctor may advise you to take extra iron to help your hair grow, but iron deficiency does not usually cause hair loss.
  - Biotin is also promoted for hair health, but medical studies show that it does not help much.
  - No other vitamins or supplements (fish oil, vitamin A, or vitamin D) have been proven to help with hair loss. But, eating a healthy, balanced diet is good for your hair and the rest of your body, too.