

Hair transplant surgery

Hair transplantation is a surgical technique that involves moving skin containing hair follicles from one part of the body (the donor site) to bald or balding parts (the recipient site).

Candidates

It is primarily used to treat male pattern baldness, whereby grafts containing hair follicles that are genetically resistant to balding are transplanted to bald scalp. However, it is also used to restore eyelashes, eyebrows, and beard hair, and to fill in scars caused by accidents and surgery such as facelifts and previous hair transplants.

Procedure

At an initial consultation, the surgeon analyzes the patient's scalp, discusses his preferences and expectations, and advises him/her on the best approach (e.g. single vs. multiple sessions) and what results might reasonably be expected.

For several days prior to surgery the patient refrains from using any medicines, or alcohol, which might result in intraoperative bleeding and resultant poor "take" of the grafts. Pre-operative antibiotics are commonly prescribed to prevent wound or graft infections.

The area where the original hair was harvested is then closed using dissolvable stitches.

Recovery period

Hair may remain undeveloped for a period of up to several months following the hair transplant, but will begin to grow normally after this time. You do not need to take any time off work although patients may prefer to take a few days off to allow the signs of surgery to fade.

Risks

Risks involved with hair transplant surgery are small, but there is a chance of infection, bleeding, numbness and visible scarring. Very occasionally the hair may not take root in the new area.

Hair thinning, known as "shock loss", is a common side effect that is usually temporary. Bald patches are also common, as fifty to a hundred hairs can be lost each day.

Other side effects include swelling of areas such as the scalp and forehead. If this becomes uncomfortable, medication may ease the swelling. Additionally, the patient must be careful if his scalp starts itching, as scratching will make it worse and cause scabs to form. A moisturizer or massage shampoo may be used in order to relieve the itching.

Several years after the surgery, more hair loss can occur, with the transplanted patches staying in place. This results in odd patches of hair, unless they are removed, or unless more hair is transplanted.