



Hair Health

Nothing quite grabs a person's attention like excessive hair loss. Hair loss can occur after bariatric surgery and is mostly a result of the body's reaction to stress. The way in which our bodies react to stress is individual. Some will experience significant temporary hair loss; others will not notice any hair loss at all. Some of the stress after surgery is unavoidable, such as the stress from the procedure itself, the stress of minimal caloric intake, and the stress of rapid weight loss. Other stressors, however, such as inadequate protein intake and suboptimal vitamin / mineral supplementation are within the control of the individual. Read on to find out all you need to know to keep your locks healthy during your weight loss journey.

First we need to bone up on the basics of hair growth. Hair goes through a cycle of growth and rest. The growth phase (anagen) usually lasts for 2-3 years during which a hair strand grows about 1/2" each month. After this, the hair strand goes into a resting phase (telogen) for 3-4 months and does not grow. About 90% of hair is in the growth phase and 10% in the resting phase at a given time. After the resting phase, the hair strand falls out, a new hair strand begins to grow in its place, and the growth phase starts all over again. A head of hair has about 100,000 strands, and people lose 50-100 strands each day.

Bariatric surgery, minimal caloric intake and the resulting rapid weight loss create stress, almost a shock to the body. This stress can cause more hair strands to go into the resting phase. As we learned in the previous paragraph, at the end of the 3-4 month resting phase, the hair falls out. The medical term for this **temporary** type of hair loss is telogen effluvium. Telogen effluvium can follow emotional distress, physiological stress, nutritional deficiencies, surgery, hormonal changes or metabolic disturbances (including thyroid conditions). Hair grows back once the condition that caused the hair loss is corrected, although it can take months before the hair returns to normal thickness.

Surgery and rapid weight loss alone can lead to hair loss. This is why many post-bariatric surgery patients experience hair loss 3-5 months after surgery for the duration of 2-3 months. They lose hair at an excessive rate until all of the hair strands that moved into the resting phase are gone.

In addition to the surgery itself and rapid weight loss, nutritional deficiencies can compound hair loss. It is essential to meet protein goals on a daily basis, take vitamin and mineral supplements as recommended and choose a diet rich in nutrients. Maintaining your nutritional status can minimize the stress that your body experiences following surgery. Less stress may mean less hair loss. Some specific nutrient deficiencies are linked to hair health.

Iron status may be correlated with hair loss. Iron levels are checked at pre-admission testing. If your level is below the reference range, discuss when and how to start a

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supplement with the Barix doctor or nutritionist. Depending upon the level, they may ask you to start a supplement right away or wait until 6 weeks post operatively. Iron supplements can be irritating to the stomach and cause both nausea and constipation. Newer chewable iron supplements are a good option. They taste great, tend to have fewer side effects, and should be better absorbed because the pill does not need to dissolve. To increase the absorption, take iron on an empty stomach if possible and not at the same time as a multi vitamin/mineral supplement or calcium supplement. Excessive iron supplementation can be toxic, so be sure to follow your Barix professional's recommendations.

Zinc deficiency can increase hair loss. A complete multi-vitamin and mineral supplement will provide adequate zinc. The recommended daily value of zinc is 15 mg. The upper limit recommendation for zinc is 40 mg—you should not take more than this as zinc is toxic if over-supplemented.

Protein intake that is less than goal level can lead to hair loss. Work hard to find supplements, foods and beverages to meet your protein goal shortly after you leave the hospital. There are so many products available to help you meet your goal. If you are having a difficult time with this, contact your Barix nutritionist for additional ideas. Be willing to try several supplements until you find one that works for you.

Other Nutrients may have an impact on hair health. These may include vitamin A, folic acid, essential fatty acids, vitamin B 6, vitamin B 12, biotin and vitamin C.

It is not wise to supplement large quantities of specific vitamins or minerals indiscriminately. Some nutrients can have toxic effects and others can cause deficiencies of other nutrients if supplemented excessively. As in just about everything else, moderation is key. Choosing a variety of healthy foods, meeting protein goals daily and taking recommended supplements is essential to a healthy head of hair. It is important for those having bariatric surgery to understand that the initial hair loss that may occur 3-5 months after surgery may be unavoidable yet is a temporary condition. Keeping a strong commitment to adequate protein and vitamin / mineral supplementation can not only minimize hair loss, but also promote optimal health throughout the weight loss journey.