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Topical Minoxidil for hair loss in men



Patient information

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What is topical Minoxidil and how does it work?

Minoxidil tablets were originally used to treat high blood pressure. It was found that a side effect of this treatment was increased hair growth. This led to the development of a topical solution of minoxidil which can be used directly on the scalp as a treatment for certain types of hair loss. How minoxidil works to improve hair growth isn't fully understood but it is thought that it is through increased blood supply to the hair follicle. It makes hairs grow for longer and encourages hairs to grow more quickly.

How to use topical minoxidil

Minoxidil can be bought without a prescription. There are several different preparations including liquids, sprays and foams. It is available in different strengths such as 2% and 5%. There are also different brand names. Regain is probably the most well-known brand but any brand that contains the correct strength is acceptable. For men generally 5% once or twice daily is recommended.

Minoxidil should be applied onto the scalp. The hair should be sectioned into a parting and the product applied, then another section created. This should be continued until all areas of scalp that require treatment are covered. Once applied you can rub it in.

Wash your hands thoroughly after use. Avoid getting your hair wet for at least four hours after application. You don't have to wash your hair daily when using Minoxidil.

Who can use topical minoxidil

Topical Minoxidil is designed for male pattern hair loss/male balding/androgenetic alopecia but can have benefits for other hair loss conditions too such as alopecia areata. If it has been recommended for you it is because it may help some aspects of your condition. Certain hair conditions will not respond to topical Minoxidil so the use of this product should ideally be guided by a specialist.

It can be used alongside topical finasteride either separately or as a combined topical product. It can also be used whilst taking other medications for hair loss such as oral Finasteride/Propecia. It is often recommended by hair transplant surgeons to be used both before and after a hair transplant.

It is not licensed in patients over the age of 65 however is commonly used in patients over that age. You will be advised if it isn't suitable for you. It may not be appropriate if you have certain heart conditions such as ischaemic heart disease.

You should also not use topical minoxidil if you are allergic to it or any of the ingredients. The solution contains propylene glycol but the foam preparation does not.

What are the potential complications

Initially topical minoxidil may cause increase hair shedding or fall during the first few weeks of starting treatment which then settles. Some preparations can cause scalp irritation. It may cause increased facial hair growth which is reversible on stopping treatment. It can also cause headaches, dizziness/light headiness and heart palpitations. All other side effects, such as ankle swelling and tinnitus, are rare.

Its benefits are usually not noticeable straight away and it often takes over a year of use in men for improvements to be seen. However, progress may be seen sooner in some cases.

Topical minoxidil only works whilst the product is still being used. Ongoing benefits require continued use. Once treatment is stopped the benefits disappear within a few weeks. Its use is therefore often required in the long term.

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