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There's A Surprising New Side Effect Of Ozempic That Doctors Want You To Know About

Women'sHealth

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March 19, 2025



There's A Link Between Ozempic and Hair Loss

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For months, there have been rumblings online about Ozempic being linked to hair loss. But like Ozempic face, Ozempic butt, and other alleged side effects of taking the medication, it was a tricky thing to pin down definitely.

Now, a new study has actually linked semaglutide (the generic name for Ozempic and Wegovy) to hair loss, and researchers discovered that the problem may be more severe in women. It's important to point out that this is early research and it hasn't been peer-reviewed yet, which is a crucial step in science.

But the findings are raising a lot of questions about taking semaglutide might lead to hair loss—and, more importantly how to work against it. Here's what the study found, plus what doctors want you to know.

Meet the experts: Gary Goldenberg, MD, assistant clinical professor of dermatology at Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai Hospital; Mir Ali, MD, medical director of MemorialCare Surgical Weight Loss Center at Orange Coast Medical Center in Fountain Valley, CA; Ife J. Rodney, MD, founding director of Eternal Dermatology + Aesthetics and founder of BLCK haircare

What did the study find?

The study, which was published in the pre-print server medRxiv, analyzed data from more than 1,900 people who were prescribed semaglutide and compared them to 1,300 people on another older weight loss drug, bupropion-naltrexone (Contrave). In case you're fuzzy on the details, semaglutide is in a class of medications called glucagon-like peptide-1 (GLP-1) receptor agonists. It works in the body to slow the movement of food in your gut, while also signaling to the brain to feel less hungry. As a result, you can end up eating less and feeling fuller, longer.

The researchers specifically focused on people who took Wegovy, which is approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to treat obesity. (While Ozempic is also FDA-approved, it's technically designed to help with blood sugar management in people with type 2 diabetes.)

The researchers then looked at hair loss diagnoses in medical records and found that people taking semaglutide had a 50% higher chance of being diagnosed with a hair loss condition. In women, the risk of developing a hair loss condition was double what it was for men. The researchers noted in the study that more research is needed to parse this out, but it's fair to be concerned if you're on one of these medications or are considering taking them.

Why might semaglutide cause hair loss?

It's important to point this out upfront: The study didn't find that semaglutide causes hair loss—it merely found an association. Still, it's worth at least considering that the semaglutide may be causing hair loss—and doctors say that's a fair assumption.

"We commonly see hair loss in patients who lose significant weight from any methods—medications, diet and exercise, or surgery," says Mir Ali, MD, medical director of MemorialCare Surgical Weight Loss Center at Orange Coast Medical Center in Fountain Valley, CA. "Hair loss is linked to overall weight loss, especially rapid weight loss."

Hair growth goes through cycles, but things like weight loss or extreme stress can shift around those cycles and raise the risk of hair loss, says Ife J. Rodney, MD, founding director of Eternal Dermatology + Aesthetics and founder of BLCK haircare.

When you lose weight quickly, it can move hair from a growth phase (called the anagen phase) to the resting and shedding phase (or telogen phase), Rodney says. "There's a condition called telogen effluvium that can occur where the hair follicles are pushed into the telogen phase, which is shedding or resting, instead of the growth phase," she says. "That can lead to hair loss."

By the way, doctors aren't shocked by these findings. "I have actually seen this phenomenon with all GLP-1s," says Gary Goldenberg, MD, assistant clinical professor of dermatology at Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai Hospital.

Because people on semaglutide tend to eat less, they're at risk of developing nutritional deficiencies like iron, zinc, and protein, which are important for healthy hair, Goldenberg explains. Throw in the risk of side effects like nausea and vomiting, and people on these medications may take in even less nutrients than they need. "Insufficient nutrition could weaken hair follicles and contribute to shedding and thinning," Goldenberg says.

Semaglutide may also influence hormones like cortisol, which could indirectly impact the health of your hair follicles, according to Goldenberg. "This is true especially in female patients, whose hair may be sensitive to hormonal changes," he adds.

How to prevent and treat hair loss from semaglutide

If you're considering taking semaglutide or are already on it, you're not automatically going to lose your hair. However, there is a risk of having some hair loss.

"Nothing can be done to completely prevent it, but making sure you get enough protein in your diet can help," Ali says. He also suggests taking any vitamin supplements that your doctor recommends, while Goldenberg recommends keeping a close eye on in your intake of iron and zinc, too. (Just check in with your healthcare provider before taking any supplement to make sure it's a good fit for you.)

It's tempting to put yourself on a supplement that contains biotin, which is a building block for hair and nail growth, but Rodney says that's unlikely to be helpful here. "This is not a biotin deficiency issue," she points out. "A general supplement might be more useful in this case."

A balanced diet with plenty of fruits and vegetables can also help lower the risk of nutritional deficiencies that may raise the risk of hair loss, Rodney says. But if you start to notice you're dealing with hair loss while on semaglutide and it bothers you, Rodney recommends using a topical medication like minoxidil. While this is typically used to treat male and female pattern baldness, she says it can also help with temporary hair loss.

If you're still struggling or you feel overwhelmed trying to manage all of this, it's time to rope in a dermatologist. "There are multiple regenerative treatments that are readily available today that can help reverse and improve semaglutide-related hair loss," Goldenberg says.

Also, keep this in mind: Any hair loss you experience from semaglutide is unlikely to last forever. "Once the weight stabilizes, the hair tends to come back to what it was before," Ali says.

Source: <https://www.aol.com/theres-surprising-side-effect-ozempic-181500651.html>