



HAIR DISORDERS

SYSTEMIC CAUSES OF HAIR LOSS

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Hair loss is both a common presenting problem by patients and a clinical challenge for physicians. Yet few dermatological problems yield as much patient satisfaction when resolved as hair loss. The diagnosis is often attributed to androgen-related hair loss, while other causes, some of which are life-threatening but treatable, are overlooked. The relevant literature on hair loss and supported findings are somewhat limited but when combined with clinical experience it is possible to identify seven major systemic etiologies of hair loss, ranging from infectious agents to unsafe supplements. Many causes are only described in the literature through case studies, though some original articles and meta-analyses are available. Careful history taking, proper examination techniques, and judicious use of laboratory tests are essential to reach the correct diagnosis in a cost-effective manner when performing a patient evaluation. Such methodical evaluation of hair loss can result in an appropriate treatment plan and provide significant patient satisfaction. Furthermore, since serious diseases such as malignancy or endocrine dysfunction can be the associated with hair loss, lives may be saved when diagnosed. An initial evaluation can be done relatively quickly and will benefit the patient.

