

Dermatologists warn against delayed hair loss treatment

In a recent survey conducted by the Public Opinion Programme (POP) at the University of Hong Kong, 80% of male respondents do not think thinning hair needs immediate attention, which is considered a major fallacy by dermatologists.

The Public Opinion Programme (POP) at the University of Hong Kong conducted a random telephone survey recently and the result revealed that males in Hong Kong are generally ignorant about hair loss problem. On behalf of Johnson & Johnson (HK) Ltd, the survey was conducted by telephone with a random sample of 505 males aged between 25 and 49. Only 20% of the respondents have correct ideas about the urgency of receiving hair loss treatment. According to Specialist in Dermatology Dr. K. L. Hau, treatment would be significantly less effective if a patient missed the crucial phase, which lies in the early stage of thinning hair. "Generally speaking, the earlier a patient starts a treatment, the better the result will be. If he/she misses the crucial phase or uses the wrong medication, the follicles might shrink or even die, which means nothing could be done to bring them back to life," states Dr. Hau. "Also it is very crucial to get the correct diagnosis from the professionals as there are different causes of hair loss."

POP has simultaneously conducted a survey which successfully interviewed 17 dermatologists on their patients' hair loss problem and their corresponding treatments. 14 of them (82%) opined that the early phase of thinning hair (i.e. stage 1 to 2 in the Norwood-Hamilton Classification System) is the best / most crucial time for treatment. According to their clinical experience, 10 of the responding dermatologists (59%) replied that most patients tend to seek help from the middle to late phase of hair loss (i.e. stage 3 to 7 in the Norwood-Hamilton Classification System). In other words, Hong Kong people should be encouraged to take a more proactive and precautionous attitude towards hair loss, in order to receive proper treatment before it is too late.

In the public survey, 80% of the respondents never paid attention to how much hair they drop daily. According to Dr. Hau, early signs of thinning hair can be very subtle and inconspicuous. It is up to the patient him/herself to observe such signs closely and seek help as early as possible. "Everyone should take note of how much hair he/she drops daily and how his/her hairline changes. Apply clinically proven anti-hair loss product or see a dermatologist specialist if you suspect you have a thinning problem."

The survey also reveals that most respondents cannot relate early signs of thinning hair to a hair loss problem. 74% of them did not think that they had a problem, but only 57% of them indicated that their hair density has been exactly the same in the past three years. The rest came across different degrees of balding, such as an increased amount of dropping hair; receding frontal hairline; expansion of the hair vortex; finer hair and partially thinning hair that exposes the scalp. "That implies some people lack the awareness on how these changes are related to hair loss. Even if they observe the signs, they do not think these would lead to baldness eventually," said Dr. Hau. Only a thorough understanding of the subject including its signs, its different phases and its causes would help a patient identify the hair loss problem early.

Besides the above mentioned misconceptions, most people have no clue about the real cause of hair loss. 29% of the respondents correctly answered genetic factor as the main cause of baldness. 21% of them attributed hair loss to mental pressure while 24% simply did not have any idea. “Actually, about 95% of hair loss cases are related to genetics. Cases that are caused by aging or other specific disorder are very rare,” opined Dr. Hau.

Hong Kong people are well known for their fast-paced lifestyles and that reflected in their attitude towards hair loss treatment. Around 60% (57%) of the respondents expected treatments to show visible effects in 3 months, while 20% of them expected the same to happen within 1 month. 7% of the respondents even anticipated visible effects after just 1 week of treatment. In the event that satisfactory results were not seen within the expected time frame, 19% of the respondents would stop using the product or receiving treatment. 13% of them even said they would give up on any kind of hair loss treatment. That reflects the impatience and craving for instant results among most Hong Kong people, even when it comes to hair loss treatment.

From the dermatologist survey conducted, 15 (88%) of the respondents indicated that the most crucial problem with balding patients is their negligent use of medically unproven hair growth products and treatments. And 11 (65%) of them believed impatience is the most detrimental factor to a successful recovery.

“Hair loss treatment is a long-term process. Patients should be patient and tolerant throughout the whole course of treatment. Do not stop a treatment or switch to another new product without spending enough time with it. Always use clinically proven products, and according to U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), there are two approved two ingredients i.e. Minoxidil or Finasteride,” said Dr. Hau.

There are six basic phases of hair loss treatments i.e. Stimulation, Reaction, Stabilization, Re-activation, Peak and Sustaining phases. Normally most patients will have to wait until the Stabilization phase (around the fifth month of treatment) before seeing any visible effects.

In conclusion, this opinion survey revealed general ignorance and misconception about hair loss issues among Hong Kong males. Most of them also have an inappropriate attitude towards relevant treatment both in terms of its urgency and the proper method. With such fallacies deeply rooted in the public psyche, many patients are likely to encounter more serious symptoms without getting help and some of them might never be cured. In fact, hair loss itself is not incurable, provided that early and medically proven treatments are received in time.

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