

# The State Journal-Register

August 2, 2004 Monday

Springfield, IL: HEALTH; Pg. 11

## Hair today, here tomorrow Don't wig out ... hereditary hair loss can be treated

YESENIA MOJARRO  
STAFF WRITER

Losing hair can be devastating, especially when it's a permanent condition.

Sharon Woods of Springfield was diagnosed with hereditary hair loss nearly 30 years ago. She watched helplessly as her hair thinned at the top of her head. "There was no treatment for it back then," Woods said.

At first, Woods hid sparse spots by using headbands. She teased and frosted her hair. But as her hair loss increased, it became more difficult to conceal it from friends and co-workers.

"Why did this have to happen to me?" Woods said she cried many times.

The American Academy of Dermatologists states that hereditary hair loss, or androgenetic alopecia, affects an estimated 50 million men and 30 million women in the United States.

The tendency can be inherited from the mother or father's side of the family, said **Dr. James Harris**, author of "The Hair Replacement Revolution." He added that dihydrotestosterone, a male hormone, is the source of hereditary hair loss in most men, but

the source in women remains unknown.

In the early 1900s, there was nothing men and women could do about pattern baldness, beyond covering bald spots with remaining hair (the comb-over) or wearing wigs.

Margie Siems, owner of Apollos Hair Center, 3150 Butler Road, endured emotional distress as a result of her hair loss.

"(It was) so traumatic that it was hard to deal with anything else," she said.

Siems said that high school was a turning point in how she coped with hair loss.

Looks are everything in high school, Siems said, recalling the number of wigs she cut up, bobby-pinning pieces to the sides of her head to cover sparse spots.

"The other kids knew and they made fun," Siems said, adding that some students tried snatching the wig pieces from her head. Some succeeded.

"Wigs and hairpieces have come a long way since," Siems said.

Recent breakthroughs in science and the hair industry have increased options for

men and women with hair loss.

For people who want to wear a wig, but are afraid it could fall off while swimming, adhesive hairpieces are an option.

"It reacts just like real hair," said Woods, who has worn a hairpiece for the past 13 years.

Wearing a hairpiece helped her regain self-confidence, she added.

However, adhesive hairpieces are not for everyone, said Dr. Elizabeth Small, a Springfield dermatologist. They're expensive and require a lot of maintenance.

"(And) it takes a lot of effort for the patient to learn to use it," Small said.

Harris said every option has its pros and cons. It's important to make a decision that is best suited to the patient's goals, he said.

For example, if men tell him they want simply to keep the hair they have, he recommends Propecia.

Propecia is a pill that stimulates regrowth by blocking the formation of DHT, according to the American Academy of Dermatologist's Web site. It is approved by the Federal

Drug Administration for men only.

Women who are pregnant or plan to be pregnant can't take Propecia because it blocks the formation of DHT, which can lead to birth defects in male fetuses, Small said.

Minoxidil, also known as Rogaine, is an option for both sexes. It works to reverse the shrinking process of hair follicles and stimulates new hair growth on the top of the scalp. It's the only medical treatment for hair loss approved by the FDA for women.

"The problem is that you have to use it for the rest of your life," Small said. That was something Toni Long of Jacksonville was reluctant to do when she started losing her hair three years ago. "I didn't want to take a lot of prescription (drugs) for my hair or be

dependent on (anything)," she said.

Long is an interior designer, and in her field image is everything. After three years of working to cover her hair loss, Long was persuaded to try minoxidil.

"I would have been unhappy with the way I look if I would have waited and let it get worse," she said.

However, minoxidil doesn't work for everyone, said Dr. Stephen Stone, a Springfield dermatologist. It works best for men or women who have been balding for less than five years.

"The next step is transplantation," Stone said.

Hair transplants have developed from the "pluggy look" of the 1950s to sophisticated techniques that allow sur-

geons to transplant one to four hairs at a time, creating a more natural appearance.

"It's a painless procedure," said Dr. Jeffrey Epstein, a hair restoration expert. He added that the procedure leaves a fine-line scar where the donor hair is pulled.

Harris suggests that patients research each option before making a choice.

"To make an adequate decision you have to know the cons," Harris said. "It's easy just to talk about the good things."

**GRAPHIC:** Sharon Woods says she hopes other women with hereditary hair loss know that there are options for treating their condition, known as androgenetic alopecia.