

## HEALTH

# Ozempic Can Be a Sneaky Cause of Hair Loss — Dermatologists Reveal How to Restore Volume

*A hair restoration expert says this smoothie add-in is his #1 pick for hair growth.*

By Marygrace Taylor | March 12, 2024 | Reviewed by Ben Behnam, MD



If you recently started taking Ozempic to manage your diabetes or weight, you might not be a stranger to side effects like feeling fuller faster or fewer cravings for fatty or sugary foods. But does Ozempic cause hair loss, too?

In some cases, the answer is yes. While the majority of people who take the med won't experience hair loss, thinner strands can be a potential indirect side effect. "With the rise of Ozempic and other related medications, we're seeing a new trend where people are coming in complaining of hair loss," says Ben Behnam, MD, a dermatologist and hair restoration specialist in Santa Monica, CA.

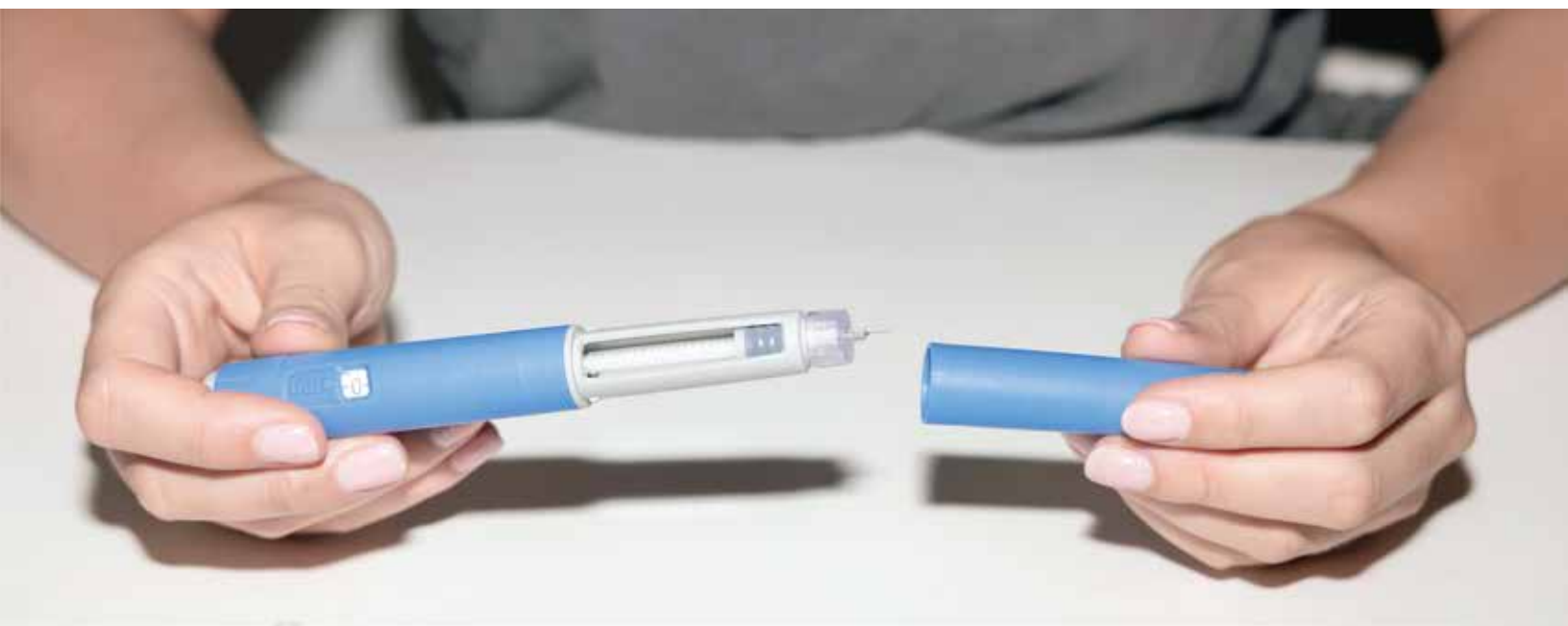
Thankfully, there are easy, natural ways to combat the problem right at home. Here's how your new Rx might be affecting your hair and what you can do to restore volume.

# How Ozempic works

Ozempic, along with similar medications like Wegovy and Rybelus, belong to a family of medications called glucagon-like peptide-1 agonists, or GLP-1 agonists. The generic name for all three meds is semaglutide. It's given as a shot in your stomach, thighs or upper arm typically once per week.

Semaglutide is approved by the FDA to treat type 2 diabetes. It keeps blood sugar in check by stimulating the body to produce more of the blood sugar-regulating hormone insulin. This helps move sugar out of your bloodstream and into your cells, where it can be used for energy.

Since weight loss is a common side effect, many doctors also now prescribe it off-label to help people manage their weight. Semaglutide “slows down gastric emptying, allowing food to remain in the stomach for longer” to help you stay full, explains Michelle Pearlman, MD, an obesity medicine specialist in Ft. Lauderdale, FL. “It also influences receptors in the brain associated with reward pathways, leading to less cravings.” (Click through to see natural GLP-1 alternatives.)



## Does Ozempic cause hair loss?

While semaglutide is best known for its ability to regulate diabetes and speed weight loss, it turns out Ozempic can indirectly cause hair loss, too. Still, you shouldn't stress too much about thinning hair if your doctor has prescribed semaglutide. Hair loss was seen in 4% of people taking Wegovy, research and user reports suggests. And it's not listed as an official side effect for Ozempic.

## How Ozempic can cause hair loss

When hair loss does happen, it's thought to be from the effects of rapid weight loss. “Given that semaglutide can substantially suppress appetite and cause gastrointestinal symptoms such as nausea and vomiting, patients often do not consume enough protein or adequate vitamins or minerals that are important for maintaining optimal health and hair,” Dr. Pearlman explains.

This lack of nutrients can put stress on the body, which can trigger heavy hair shedding within several months of starting semaglutide. “It's like a shock to the system,” Dr. Behnam says. The good news is that the problem is often temporary. “A lot of times we'll see a person's body adjust and adapt and their hair will grow back. But it can take months,” he adds.

And the problem might be compounded in women as we age. Why? Menopause-driven hormonal shifts can cause your hair to thin or shed, Dr. Behnam notes. In fact, up to 60% of women report having fewer, thinner strands by age 60. (Click through to discover the surprising cause of an itchy scalp and hair loss.)

Note: Thinner or sparser hair could potentially be an early sign of type 2 diabetes. Unmanaged high blood sugar could negatively impact the vessels that deliver blood to your scalp. So if you're experiencing hair loss and you're not sure why, let your doctor know.



## Other side effects of Ozempic

While Ozempic can indirectly cause hair loss, you're far more likely to experience other side effects from taking semaglutide. Some of the most common include:

- Feeling bloated or full
- Gas
- Heartburn
- Stomach cramping or pain
- Nausea or vomiting
- Diarrhea

## 5 ways to boost hair growth

We know that Ozempic and rapid weight loss can be one cause of hair loss. But that doesn't mean you're destined for sparse strands forever. There's a good chance that your hair will gradually recover as your body gets used to taking semaglutide, Dr. Behnam says. In the meantime, there are plenty of easy, natural ways to help the process along. Five expert-backed strategies to try:

# 1. Sip a strong-hair smoothie

More protein is Dr. Behnam's number one recommendation for his female patients with hair loss. "Your body uses the amino acids from protein to make hair. If you don't eat enough protein, you can't build strong, healthy hair," he says.

You should aim to get 1 to 1.2 grams of protein per kilogram of body weight daily (that's around 75 to 90 grams protein for a 165-pound woman). Dr. Behnam encourages his patients have a daily fruit smoothie with a scoop of protein powder, like Orgain Organic Vegan Protein Powder (Buy from Amazon, \$26.99), to up their intake.

For an extra healthy-hair boost, add a scoop of collagen powder, too. Collagen is your hair's main structural protein. A study in *Skin Research & Technology* found that taking 300 mg of collagen daily for three months improved hair growth in people with hair loss.



# 2. Mist with rosemary

The herb doesn't just smell great, it's also a top-notch treatment for your tresses. In fact, rosemary essential oil is just as effective as topical hair growth medications like minoxidil, according to a study in the *Journal of Clinical and Aesthetic Dermatology*.

"Rosemary oil is believed to improve blood circulation to the scalp, thereby providing nourishment to the hair follicles and promoting hair growth," explains **Jody Levine, MD**, a dermatologist in New York City.

You can make your own rosemary-infused tincture at home by boiling a handful (about 1/4 cup) of fresh rosemary leaves in 2 cups of water for 15 to 20 minutes. Once cooled, transfer the liquid to a spray bottle. Then give your scalp a generous spritz after shampooing and conditioning, **Dr. Levine** recommends. Refrigerate the remaining mixture for up to two weeks. (Click through to learn more about rosemary oil for hair loss.)

### 3. Condition with castor oil

Giving your hair a little TLC with a castor oil conditioner encourages healthy growth. Here's how to do it: Apply a generous amount of organic, cold-pressed castor oil to your scalp. Then slip on a shower cap and relax for two hours before washing out, **Dr. Levine** recommends.

"Castor oil is thought to benefit the scalp by keeping it moisturized and improving blood flow," which may support hair growth, **Dr. Levine** explains. Just be sure to shampoo your hair thoroughly after two hours are up (set a timer if you think you might forget). Leaving the castor oil on your scalp for longer could potentially cause irritation, says **Dr. Levine**.



### 4. Try a multivitamin

If semaglutide is suppressing your appetite, you're likely eating less, In turn, you could potentially falling short on healthy-hair nutrients like iron, vitamin D and zinc, Dr. Behnam and **Dr. Levine** agree. Luckily, taking a simple multivitamin each day is an easy way to make sure your tresses (and the rest of your body) get the nutrients they need to thrive.

Tip: Consider talking with your doctor about potential nutrient deficiencies, too, Dr. Behnam says. Your provider can measure your iron, vitamin D and zinc levels with a simple blood test. If you're very low in a particular nutrient, you can decide together if you should take a higher-dose supplement.



### 5. Savor a chocolate treat

Next time you're feeling tense, stop for a few minutes to enjoy a square of dark chocolate. Emotional stress may trigger or worsen hair loss (not to mention turn more of your existing strands gray), Harvard research suggests. But enjoying just 1.5 ounces of dark or milk chocolate daily may help tame tension. That's likely thanks to cocoa's antioxidants, a study in the *International Journal of Health Sciences* suggests. Dove moment, anyone?