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Effect of camouflaging agents on psychological well-being: A cross-sectional survey of hair loss patients



To the Editor: Pattern hair loss is common in the general population, affecting 50% of men by age 50¹ and 30% of women by age 30,² with prevalence increasing with age. Despite the high prevalence, few treatment options with established safety and efficacy are available. Topical minoxidil, oral finasteride, anti-androgen therapy are commonly used¹ but require indefinite use and rarely accomplish complete regrowth, leaving many patients dissatisfied.³ Hair loss is associated with substantial psychological distress that is particularly severe for women. In a study of 60 men and 96 women with pattern hair loss, 52% of women and 27% of men were very to extremely upset about their hair loss.³

There is a paucity of information regarding topical camouflaging agents used to conceal hair loss. To the authors' knowledge, there is only one study of 40 patients investigating the effect of these products on patients' confidence, which was reported to improve.⁴ In the present study, we sought to better understand the use of these products and their impact on patients' appearance and self-esteem.

A link to a 12-query, anonymous, IRB-approved survey, created using Survey Monkey, was posted on various Internet hair loss blogs. Individuals completed the survey voluntarily and were included if they were at least 18 years old with self-reported hair loss. In total, 359 individuals responded. Of these, 348 (97%) reported hair loss, and 281 (78%) had seen a physician about their hair loss. Camouflaging agents were used by 283 (79%), and the products chosen were most often hair-building fibers (59%), followed by hairpieces and wigs (51%). Forty-three percent used topical concealing agents daily. Use of these

products improved appearance in 216 (82%) respondents, and 173 (71%) reported improved self-esteem.

Patients gave 316 responses to open-ended questions asking about their topical concealer experiences and preferences. Topical concealers worked well for minimal-to-moderate hair loss, but a hairpiece was preferred as hair loss progressed. Negative aspects of topical concealers were messiness (particularly on clothing, bedding, and bathroom surfaces), time for application, expense, itchiness, anxiety over concealers being conspicuous or unnatural looking, and the removing effects of wind, rain, and swimming. Many believed the positive effects on appearance and self-confidence outweighed these negative aspects.

Although most respondents saw a physician for hair loss, only 8 of 270 respondents (3%) reported learning about concealing products from their physician. We attempted to contact 20 regional dermatologists specializing in hair loss to ascertain if these products were recommended; only 4 responded, and none recommended these products, confirming our results. This experience further suggests that patients might have difficulty obtaining information before or after an appointment.

Products to conceal hair loss are readily available online from dozens of retailers. Table 1 provides information about types of products and their cost.⁵

Pattern hair loss is one of the most common chronic problems encountered by dermatologists.¹ Given the significant psychologic morbidity in patients with hair loss and the limited effective treatment options, the authors believe that physicians should educate their patients about topical concealing agents, which can serve as an adjunct to medical therapy and improve psychologic well-being.

Limitations of this study include the potential for survey bias and recall bias from self-reporting patients.

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Table I. Hair loss concealing products

Product	Application	Frequency of use	Mechanism of camouflage	Advantages	Disadvantages	Approximate cost per unit	Company websites
Fibers and powders							
Toppik	Sprinkled onto balding areas of scalp	Daily	Positively-charged fibers bind to negatively-charged hair	- Hair appears thicker and fuller	- Application can be messy	\$5-\$30	www.toppik.com
X-fusion				- Easy to apply	- Powders rub off on pillow		www.xfusionhair.com
Caboki	Hair spray can be used to keep fibers in place			- Good for use in mild-to-moderate hair loss	- Requires practice to achieve desired look		www.caboki.com
Nanogen				- Washes out with showers, swimming, heavy rain	www.nanogenhair.com		
Organin				- Not as natural looking or practical for more extensive hair loss	www.organin.com		
Boom Boom Hair					www.boomboomhair.com		
Mirage fibers					www.miragehairfibers.com		
Megathik					www.millefolium.com		
Supermillion hair					www.add-hair/hair-so-real.com		
Kerasome fibers					www.megathik.com		
Finally Hair					www.supermillionhair.net		
Infinity Hair Loss					www.kerasome.com		
Joan Rivers Hair Powder					www.finallyhair.com www.infinityhair.com www.qvc.com		
Powder cakes							
DermMatch	Apply to scalp with a wet sponge applicator Best done on damp hair after a shower	Daily or after showers	Colors or paints the scalp and binds to hair fibers	- Minimizes contrast between hair and scalp - Water resistant - Ideal for focal areas, especially frontal hairline - Can stay on for days without reapplication - Less messy than fibers - One unit lasts months	- More time-consuming to apply than hair fibers - Can stain pillow and towels	\$30	www.dermmatch.com

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