

# GLP-1 and Hair Loss: What Patients Need to Know



If you've recently started taking GLP-1 medications like Ozempic, Wegovy, Mounjaro, or Zepbound, you might have noticed something unexpected happening to your hair. You're not imagining it: and you're certainly not alone. Whilst hair loss isn't listed as an official side effect in clinical trials, thousands of patients have reported increased hair shedding after starting these medications.

Don't panic though. The good news is that this type of hair loss is usually temporary and manageable. Let's dive into everything you need to know about GLP-1 medications and their potential impact on your hair.

## What Are GLP-1 Medications?

GLP-1 receptor agonists are a class of medications originally developed to treat type 2 diabetes. They work by mimicking a hormone called GLP-1 (glucagon-like peptide-1) that your body naturally produces. These medications help regulate blood sugar levels and have the added benefit of promoting significant weight loss.

Popular GLP-1 medications include:

- **Semaglutide** (brand names: Ozempic, Wegovy)
- **Tirzepatide** (brand names: Mounjaro, Zepbound)
- **Liraglutide** (brand name: Saxenda)

These medications have become increasingly popular for weight management, with many patients achieving remarkable results. However, as more people use them, we're learning about additional effects: including changes to hair.



## The Connection: Why GLP-1 Medications Can Cause Hair Loss

The hair loss associated with GLP-1 medications isn't actually caused by the medication itself. Instead, it's typically triggered by the rapid weight loss that these medications can produce. This type of hair loss is called **telogen effluvium**, and it's your body's response to physical stress.

Here's what happens: when you lose weight quickly, it creates a shock to your system. This stress pushes many of your hair follicles into the "resting" phase of the hair growth cycle prematurely. Several months later, these hairs begin to shed all at once, which can be quite alarming when you're not expecting it.

### The Perfect Storm: Multiple Factors at Play

Several interconnected factors contribute to hair loss in people taking GLP-1 medications:

**Rapid Weight Loss:** Losing weight too quickly: typically more than 1-2 pounds per week: can trigger telogen effluvium. Your body interprets this rapid change as stress and responds accordingly.

**Nutritional Deficiencies:** When you're eating significantly less (which GLP-1 medications encourage), you might not be getting enough essential nutrients. Hair growth requires adequate protein, iron, zinc, biotin, and various vitamins. When your body doesn't have enough of these nutrients, hair production takes a back seat to more vital functions.

**Hormonal Changes:** Fat tissue plays a role in hormone production, particularly oestrogen. When you lose fat quickly, your hormone levels can fluctuate, potentially affecting hair growth patterns.

**Metabolic Stress:** Any significant change to your body's normal functioning: including the metabolic changes from GLP-1 medications: can create stress that impacts hair follicles.



## Timeline: What to Expect and When

Most patients notice increased hair shedding about **3 to 6 months** after starting GLP-1 medications. This timeline makes perfect sense when you understand the hair growth cycle:

- Hair follicles that are pushed into the resting phase don't immediately shed
- It takes about 3 months for these hairs to actually fall out
- The shedding period typically lasts 3-6 months
- New hair growth usually begins as the shedding tapers off

This delayed timeline often catches people off guard because they don't initially connect their hair loss to their medication or weight loss journey.

## Types of Hair Changes You Might Experience

Hair loss from GLP-1 medications can manifest in several ways:

## **Increased Shedding**

This is the most common complaint. You might notice more hair in your brush, on your pillow, or going down the drain when you wash your hair. This diffuse shedding typically affects the entire scalp rather than specific areas.

## **Changes in Hair Texture**

Many patients report that their hair feels different: perhaps drier, more brittle, or lacking its usual shine. This can be due to nutritional deficiencies affecting the quality of new hair growth.

## **Slower Hair Growth**

You might notice that your hair isn't growing as quickly as it used to, or that it takes longer for your hair to recover its previous thickness after a trim.

## **Thinning Throughout**

Rather than developing bald spots, most people experience overall thinning, where their hair feels less dense but maintains its general pattern.

## **Is This Hair Loss Permanent?**

Here's the reassuring news: hair loss from GLP-1 medications is typically **temporary and reversible**. This isn't the same as male or female pattern baldness, which is progressive and permanent. Telogen effluvium is a reactive condition that usually resolves once the triggering factor is addressed.

Most patients see their hair return to normal thickness within 6-12 months, assuming they take steps to support their hair health and their weight loss stabilises.



## What You Can Do About It

### Nutritional Support is Crucial

The most important thing you can do is ensure you're getting adequate nutrition despite eating less:

**Prioritise Protein:** Aim for at least 0.8-1 gram of protein per kilogram of body weight daily. Hair is primarily made of protein, so this is non-negotiable.

#### Focus on Hair-Healthy Nutrients:

- Iron (found in lean meats, spinach, lentils)
- Zinc (pumpkin seeds, chickpeas, cashews)
- Biotin (eggs, salmon, avocados)
- Vitamin D (fatty fish, fortified foods, sunlight)
- B-vitamins (whole grains, leafy greens)

**Consider Supplements:** If you're struggling to get enough nutrients from food alone, high-quality supplements can help bridge the gap. However, always consult with your healthcare provider before starting any new supplements.

### Be Gentle with Your Hair

While you're experiencing increased shedding:

- Use a wide-tooth comb instead of a brush

- Avoid tight hairstyles that pull on your hair
- Limit heat styling and chemical treatments
- Choose gentle, moisturising hair products
- Don't over-wash: every other day or less is often sufficient

### **Monitor Your Weight Loss Rate**

If you're losing weight very rapidly, discuss with your healthcare provider whether adjusting your medication dose might help slow the rate of loss to a more sustainable level.

### **Stay Hydrated and Manage Stress**

Dehydration and stress can worsen hair loss, so ensure you're drinking plenty of water and finding healthy ways to manage any stress in your life.

### **When to Seek Professional Help**

Contact your healthcare provider if you experience:

- Sudden, severe hair loss
- Hair loss in patches rather than overall thinning
- Hair loss that continues beyond 6-8 months
- Signs of nutritional deficiencies (fatigue, brittle nails, pale skin)
- Concerns about your overall health

Your doctor might recommend blood tests to check for nutritional deficiencies, thyroid problems, or other underlying conditions that could be contributing to hair loss.



## Treatment Options

If your hair loss is significant or persistent, several treatment options are available:

**Nutritional Interventions:** Working with a registered dietitian to optimise your nutrition whilst maintaining your weight loss goals.

**Topical Treatments:** Minoxidil (available over-the-counter) can help stimulate hair regrowth in some cases.

**Professional Hair Treatments:** Some patients benefit from scalp treatments or professional-grade hair care products designed to support hair growth.

**Medical Evaluation:** In some cases, prescription treatments or more detailed medical investigation might be appropriate.

## The Bigger Picture

Remember that hair loss, whilst distressing, is often a temporary side effect of positive changes you're making for your health. The benefits of GLP-1 medications: improved blood sugar control, significant weight loss, and reduced risk of cardiovascular disease: often far outweigh temporary cosmetic concerns.

Many patients find that once their weight stabilises and they've optimised their nutrition, their hair not only returns to its previous thickness but actually looks healthier than before due to their improved overall health.

## Final Thoughts

Hair loss can be emotionally challenging, especially when you're already navigating the changes that come with weight loss. It's important to be patient with yourself and remember that this is typically a temporary phase in your health journey.

Focus on nourishing your body with adequate nutrition, be gentle with your hair care routine, and maintain open communication with your healthcare provider. With time and proper care, most patients find their hair returns to normal.

If you're concerned about any aspect of your treatment or are experiencing significant side effects, don't hesitate to reach out to your healthcare team.

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