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The Best Hair Loss Treatment

We cut through hundreds of snake oils to find three methods that *actually* work.

Our Top Pick for Men and Women



Men's Rogaine Unscented Foam

A 5% minoxidil foam that's clinically proven to slow hair loss and even regrow some hair. Men and women can use it without a prescription.

[Check Price](#)

Same Product, Different Packaging



Women's Rogaine

The ingredients are exactly the same as Men's Rogaine. The difference? Women are instructed to use it once a day, and you'll have to pay more if you buy in bulk.

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A Cheaper, Generic Version



Kirkland Signature Minoxidil Foam

A generic version of Rogaine. It has the five percent minoxidil that will slow hair loss, but Rogaine has a longer history of satisfied customers.

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A Supplemental Laser Option



HairMax Ultima 12 LaserComb

Non-invasive and non-chemical. Using it is as simple as brushing your hair, but it is expensive and isn't as effective as Rogaine.

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Editor's Note



The Best Hair Loss Treatments

- [Men's Rogaine Unscented Foam](#) - Best Overall for Men and Women
- [Kirkland Signature Regrowth Treatment Minoxidil Foam for Men](#) - Generic Runner-Up
- [Equate Hair Regrowth Treatment for Men](#) - Generic Runner-Up
- [HairMax Ultima 12 LaserComb](#) - A Pricey Add-on Treatment

There's no cure for baldness, but there are ways to hold on to what you've got. The six dermatologists and the clinical studies point to three methods:

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minoxidil, laser treatments, and prescription finasteride. The key is finding the combination and hair loss regimen that works for you. A doctor is your best bet for that kind of guidance – but we found a few trustworthy products that will work for most people.

Our top pick is [Men's Rogaine Unscented Foam](#). It contains five percent minoxidil which has been clinically proven to slow hair loss and even regrow some hair. It's also FDA-approved and non-prescription, which means it's not only effective and safe for use but widely available. You can easily find a three-month supply on Amazon for about \$35.

There's also a women's version ([Women's Rogaine Foam](#)) – but a three-month supply costs \$22 more online. The only difference between the two products are the instructions; women are instructed to apply once a day instead of twice. If you're a woman who doesn't feel like paying extra for marketing, the men's product will suffice. A cheaper generic version is [Kirkland Signature Minoxidil Foam](#), but with a longer history on the market and more customer testimonials, Rogaine is our first choice.

Our other recommendation is the [HairMax Ultima 12 LaserComb](#). The comb uses low-level lasers to stimulate hair follicles and modulate dihydrotestosterone (DHT) – a hormone that causes the most common type of hair loss. While it sounds like something from a sci-fi movie, the treatment works, and the dermatologists we consulted reported that their patients saw thicker and longer hair when combined with our top pick. The only catch: The comb isn't as effective as minoxidil treatments, and at nearly \$400, it's a much bigger investment. Still, it's the best option if you're looking for a non-invasive, non-chemical treatment.

How We Found the Best Hair Loss Treatment

“The most common cause of hair loss in both men and women is **androgenetic alopecia**, which is genetic pattern hair loss,” explains [Dr. Michael B. Wolfeld](#), a board-certified plastic surgeon and an assistant clinical professor of plastic surgery at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York. The root cause of this type of hair loss is dihydrotestosterone (DHT), a byproduct of testosterone that shrinks certain hair follicles until they eventually stop producing hair.

Other medical conditions – most commonly **telogen effluvium** and **seborrheic dermatitis** – can also cause hair loss, but most people can trace their follicular woes back to androgenetic alopecia, so we focused our search there. We started with more than 200 products, including all-natural solutions and high-tech gadgets, while skipping treatments that focus only on volumizing or thickening hair. We also limited our scope to the scalp, and left out specialty products designed only for eyebrows or beards.

We dug into clinical studies and talked to experts in the field, who helped identify specific ingredients that have proven effective in combating hair loss and growth just under the



What about 'hair building fibers'?

Products like [Toppik](#) use statically charged keratin fibers that bind to existing hair shafts, which may make hair look thicker, but does nothing to prevent hair loss. You might want to consider using one of these products in addition to an actual hair loss treatment, but don't count on it alone.

guide: "Make the Right Choice: A 10-Minute Guide to Not Messing Up Your Next Purchase".

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effective in combating hair loss and aren't just snake oil.

The ugly truth: The vast majority of hair loss treatments boast exaggerated claims, and a startling number have absolutely no scientific backing whatsoever.

Our first step: eliminating those snake oils.

To us, that meant any product with zero proven ingredients, case studies, or FDA clearance — which shrunk our list by a whopping 180 contenders. That's right, there are only three treatments that have actually been cleared by the FDA and supported with clinical studies: **finasteride** (commonly marketed as Propecia), **minoxidil**, and **laser treatments**. And, since finasteride is prescription-only, it left us with two.

What exactly is FDA clearance?

With those pinned down, it wasn't hard to determine which don't actually work. Pretty much all the "active" ingredients listed in ineffective treatments — from biotin and zinc to emu oil and saw palmetto — have never been proven, and are instead marketed based on logical-seeming correlations. It would make sense that biotin, a B vitamin readily found in hair, skin, and nails, could help hair grow more quickly. And caffeine is a stimulant that works in coffee, so rubbing some on your scalp might wake some of those sleepy follicles... right?

Not so fast. Dr. Alex Khadavi, a board-certified dermatologist and associate professor of dermatology at the University of Southern California, says that it's a good idea to approach all of these products with a skeptical eye.

"There's people selling pills and creams and lotions and whatever else, and sometimes you can't even trust what ingredients they have in there," he warned us when we spoke to him over the phone. Key takeaway: The hair loss industry is crazy dishonest, so we eliminated any treatments (especially homeopathic methods) that aren't based in concrete, peer-reviewed science.

180 products cut

We favored minoxidil over laser treatments.

Laser treatments are the latest frontier in staving off hair loss, and they'll be the first choice for fans of sci-fi. As silly as they may sound, these treatments do work — the *American Journal of Clinical Dermatology* in

Beware online stores selling Propecia without a prescription.

Finasteride is FDA approved, but buying it online without a prescription can be illegal and dangerous. Prescription-free online stores have a reputation for selling placebos or dangerous replacements. We recommend speaking with a doctor about prescriptions or sticking to save over-the-counter treatments.

Double your efforts.

Even if you're taking finasteride or applying minoxidil daily, you can still use a laser

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2014 reported a “statistically significant difference” in hair density with no “serious adverse events” or side effects. The bad news: Laser treatments tend to be expensive, progress is slow, and they don’t always produce stellar results.

treatment. In fact, every doctor we asked recommended combining treatments.

Dr. Cheri Ong, dermatologist for American Dermatology Associates, Inc., confirmed and explained “Low-level laser treatments (LLLT) are popular non-invasive and non-chemical options for hair loss that work by activating energy production in the hair follicle and modulating DHT.”

“I think their effectiveness is not as significant as finasteride or minoxidil,” says Dr. Wolfeld, “however, it’s something that can be used quite easily by patients at home. If they use it two or three times a week, I tell them it can help to thicken their hair.” Results can take up to 18 months to show up, so Dr. Wolfeld stresses that patience is a virtue.

4 products cut

And then ditched 2 percent minoxidil treatments for 5 percent.

Not surprisingly, treatments with 5 percent minoxidil work better than treatments with 2 percent minoxidil. A randomized clinical trial published in the *American Journal of Clinical Dermatology* in 2002 found that, in men with androgenetic alopecia, “5 percent topical minoxidil was clearly superior to 2 percent topical minoxidil and placebo in increasing hair growth.” The difference was actually pretty astounding – after 48 weeks, the men who used 5 percent minoxidil experienced 45 percent more hair growth than the men who used the 2 percent treatment.

A separate study, published in *Skin Therapy Letter* – a professional reference site for dermatologists – found that women also benefit from using the more potent 5 percent minoxidil treatment. “Patient-reported improvement in hair volume and coverage appears to be greater with 5 percent minoxidil foam,” reads the report. Plus, because the 5 percent treatment is stronger, women only have to apply it once a day to get the same results as they would with the 2 percent treatment applied twice daily.

9 products cut

We cut anything including propylene glycol.

While there are no overtly harmful ingredients in over-the-counter minoxidil, liquid solutions contain propylene glycol, which may cause itching, redness, and irritation. The topic is a contentious one – researchers point out documented cases of irritation while others point to studies that show small amounts are harmless and even safe to eat.

The truth is, the amount of propylene glycol in hair loss treatments is not likely to cause

That meant new products like Hims

in hair loss treatments is not likely to cause any real harm and the FDA has given the chemical approval for many uses. But even though it is safe, we wanted to ensure that our top picks would be as comfortable to use as possible. So when Dr. Khadavi told us that “a third of my patients get irritated from minoxidil products because of propylene glycol,” we decided to cut any treatments with it. In any case, it’s the minoxidil that helps curb hair loss and not the propylene glycol.

Fortunately, most minoxidil foams don’t use propylene glycol and thus stand a much lower chance of irritating your scalp than their liquid counterparts — all our top picks are foams.

and Keeps were out.

Hims and Keeps are relatively new companies that allow you to set up a subscription for hair loss treatments. Both offer finasteride (after an online consultation with a doctor) or 5 percent minoxidil. However, their minoxidil solutions contain propylene glycol, so we cut them from consideration.

11 products cut

Our Top Picks for Men and Women

Our Top Pick for Men and Women



Men's Rogaine

Men's Rogaine Unscented Foam

Check Price

A 5% minoxidil foam that’s clinically proven to slow hair loss and even regrow some hair. Men and women can use it without a prescription.

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In our research and our conversations with experts, one name kept popping up repeatedly: Rogaine. As the first topical brand FDA-approved to help regrow hair (all the way back in 1988), Rogaine benefits from more than 20 years of clinical trials and consumer feedback. Rogaine was the first brand to offer a 5 percent minoxidil foam solution when it debuted Men’s Rogaine Unscented Foam in 2006, and virtually every treatment developed since (for both men and women) has been an imitation or derivation of that formula.

And that’s why Men’s Rogaine Unscented Foam is our top pick — it’s the exact same product as the women’s formula, and much cheaper.






The Rogaine rep we spoke to explained that the different packaging (and therefore different prices) has to do with the FDA-approval process: “We discovered in clinical trials that the hair loss patterns between men and women are different,” she said by way of explanation. “Men typically have that bald spot on the crown of their head, where women generally have a general thinning throughout, but concentrated more on the top of the head. So for FDA approval, we had to come up with two different, gender-specific products, so the directions were more explanatory.”

The only real difference between the men’s and women’s directions (beyond different diagrams of hair loss patterns): Men are instructed to use Rogaine twice daily; women only once.

Why? Unwanted hair growth (sideburns, for example) is a reported side effect of minoxidil. The belief is that a higher concentration of minoxidil would result in more unwanted hair, which is why women are instructed to use it less often. However, the study in [Skin Therapy Letter](#) reports that unwanted hair was more common in 2 percent minoxidil solutions than 5 percent, and women are instructed to use Rogaine’s 2 percent solution twice daily – so what gives?

The simple answer is that hair loss and growth is tied to genetics, so how responses will differ from person to person. This is all to say you should really work with your doctor to figure out what treatment plan will work best for you.

Same Product, Different Packaging




Women's Rogaine
Women's Rogaine Foam

[Check Price](#)

The ingredients are exactly the same as Men's Rogaine. The only difference: Women are instructed to use it once a day, and you'll have to pay more if you buy in bulk.

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If you’re a lady and can remember the one difference in directions (or just scope out the instructions online) we recommend saving the cash. Similarly, you could go generic with [Equate Hair Regrowth Treatment for Men](#) or Costco’s [Kirkland Signature Hair Regrowth Treatment Minoxidil Foam for Men](#). These alternatives offer the same percentage of active minoxidil and near-identical inactive ingredients for as little as half the price – a great option for both genders.

<p>A Cheaper, Generic Version</p> 	<p>Kirkland Signature</p> <p>Kirkland Signature Regrowth Treatment Minoxidil Foam for Men</p> <p>Check Price</p> <p>A generic version of Rogaine. It has the five percent minoxidil that will slow hair loss, but Rogaine has a longer history of satisfied customers.</p>
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We gave preference to Rogaine, because it has a longer history on the market and a greater number of customer testimonials online, but both the Equate and Kirkland versions are solid options.

Rogaine’s foam squirts out just like hair mousse and is applied with “cool, dry hands.” Applying means working the foam down to the scalp where you want to see thicker growth – for it to work, “it has to get into your scalp,” Dr. Wolfeld explains. “If it sits on your hair, it’s not really as effective.” Once massaged, it dissolves into a watery liquid that leaves a tingly sensation, “but no burning!” one of our balding testers was happy to discover.



Once applied, Rogaine’s foam formula quickly transforms into a liquid.


Other Hair Loss Treatments to Consider

<p>A More Concentrated Solution</p> 	<p>Men's Rogaine</p> <p>Men's Rogaine Extra Strength Solution</p> <p>Check Price</p> <p>The higher concentration of minoxidil may offer better, faster results – but it also contains an irritating ingredient.</p>
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Men's Rogaine Extra Strength Solution is the liquid version of our top pick. It didn't make our final cut because it includes propylene glycol, which causes

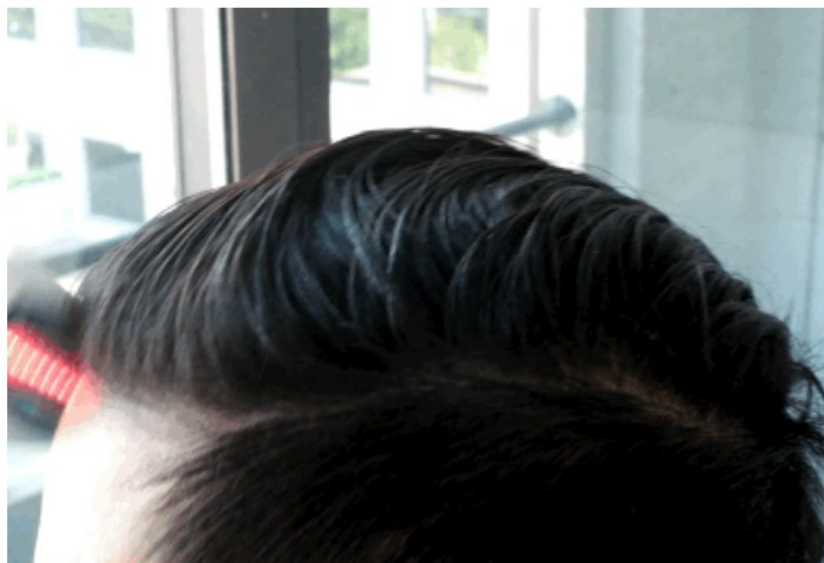
irritation in roughly one-third of its users. With that said, Dr. Wolfeld finds that it can be even more effective in practical daily use. In his experience, “the solution can penetrate and get into your scalp a little bit better” than the foam — especially if you’re not taking the time and effort to apply the foam correctly. This seems crazy to us since the foam so quickly dissolved into a liquid in our tests, but if you’re worried, try a one-month supply of the liquid and make the switch to foam if you notice any irritation.

<p>A Supplemental Laser Option</p> 	<h3>HairMax LaserComb</h3> <p>HairMax Ultima 12 LaserComb</p> <p>Check Price</p> <p>Non-invasive and non-chemical. Using it is as simple as brushing your hair, but it is expensive and isn't as effective as Rogaine.</p>
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The [HairMax Ultima 12 LaserComb](#) (\$395) makes for a great addition to any hair loss regimen — provided you can afford it. Dr. Wolfeld notes that it’s a popular option in his practice. “Some people like the action of combing something through their hair,” he says. “They find that to be a little bit easier to do as part of their routine in the morning.” Dr. Khadavi also recommends using a laser treatment of some kind in conjunction with other treatments. “Lasers do help in stimulating the hair into the growth phase. We don’t know the exact mechanism of how it works, but it definitely helps.”

The general medical consensus around laser treatments — caps and combs alike — is that low-level laser light therapy stimulates the cells within the hair follicle. These devices may also increase cell metabolism to promote thicker and more durable hair shafts, something that neither minoxidil or finasteride can do. To use the HairMax Ultima, all you have to do is glide the device over your scalp slowly. Treatments should take about eight minutes, and you should do it three days per week for the best results.



Hair Loss 101

Some of the most commonly cited “causes” of hair loss have no scientific backing.

- **Wearing a hat won't make you go bald.** As Dr. Bernstein notes, hair follicles get their oxygen from the bloodstream as opposed to the air, so go ahead and rock your favorite team's cap every day.
- **Bald guys don't have more testosterone.** But they do have a higher percentage of hair follicles genetically susceptible to DHT. It sounds a lot less sexy when you put it that way. *BBC Future* did a whole investigation into this myth, proving once and for all that [Bruce Willis is no more virile than Fabio](#).
- **Hair loss isn't just passed down from your mother's side.** Actually, [both parents may contribute genes](#) that may make you more susceptible to hair loss, as this video from *AsapScience* illustrates.
- **Using too much hairspray or gel won't cause hair loss.** This was just one of [several myths debunked](#) in an entertaining 2011 report by US News.
- **It's not just men that lose hair on their scalp.** As our research makes abundantly clear, plenty of women suffer from hair loss, too. The American Academy of Dermatology estimates that as many as [30 million women in the U.S. suffer from hereditary hair loss](#).

Let's take a closer look at what works:

Because there's no cure for baldness (yet), there's no hair loss treatment that's going to leave you totally satisfied. That said, there are three FDA-approved treatments – minoxidil, finasteride, and lasers – that can stave off hair loss for the foreseeable future. Use them together for best results.

	Finasteride (Propecia)	Minoxidil (2% or 5%)	Laser Treatments
Approved for Men/Women	No, men only	Yes	Yes
Application Types	Pill (1 mg dose)	Foam, serum, spray, or shampoo or conditioner	Laser cap or comb
Prescription Required	Yes	No	No
Possible Side Effects	Low libido, erectile dysfunction, decreased sexual arousal	Burning sensation, unwanted hair growth, dizziness, and more.	Minimal; itching and tingling of scalp

Prescription finasteride is usually the first line of defense against hair loss – for men.

“In men, the most effective treatment for thinning hair is finasteride,” says Dr. Wolfeld, who routinely prescribes the pill to his patients.

Indeed, finasteride (also known as Propecia) works by lowering the body's levels of the hormone DHT, which binds to receptors in hair follicles at the top of the scalp, causing

“Finasteride is a great medication that goes to the root cause of hair loss. You always have to address the root cause of the hair loss or they're going to continue to lose more hair.”

Dr. Alex Khadavi

Board-Certified Dermatologist and Associate Professor of Dermatology at the University of Southern California

them to gradually shrink
and lose the ability to grow thick hair.

The follicles on the sides of the scalp are more genetically resistant to DHT, which is why male pattern baldness often results in a “crown” of hair. But its downsides are serious. “With women, finasteride is not an option,” says Dr. Wolfeld. “It’s not FDA-approved for women to take, so we don’t prescribe it.” In fact, due to the drug’s effect on hormone levels, pregnant women are advised to not even touch broken or crushed tablets.

Men may also experience some sexual and emotional side effects while taking it: In a study published in the June 2011 issue of *The Journal of Sexual Medicine*, Dr. Michael Irwig of George Washington University found as many as 92 percent of test subjects reporting problems in the bedroom. The study also reported that “the mean duration of finasteride use was 28 months and the mean duration of persistent sexual side effects was 40 months,” meaning that side effects lingered long after subjects stopped taking the pill.

How worried should men be about the sexual side effects of finasteride? “What I tell men is that it’s not something they should stress about,” says Dr. Wolfeld, “but it is something they should be aware of.” In his experience, he notes only a roughly 5 percent incidence of sexual dysfunction reported by patients who take the medication.

A hair transplant is currently the best long-term solution, but it’s an investment.

Aside from medication and lasers, some opt for hair transplants — a procedure where hairs are removed from another part of your body and then transplanted to the thinning or balding areas. Does it work? In a word, yes. Research suggests that most hair transplant recipients report are “very satisfied” with their results. While successful, transplants are also far more expensive than medications, foams, or lasers with costs averaging anywhere from \$4,000 or \$15,000.

Hair transplants will likely lead to better results in the long run (you are introducing new hairs to the balding areas), but you’ll still need to use minoxidil or finasteride after surgery to maintain the results. Like all hair loss treatments, hair transplants are best when combined with other methods, and you’ll want to speak with your doctor to see what combination is best for you.

New hair loss treatments are on the way, and the early signs are promising.

Research for hair loss treatments is ongoing, and new companies are sprouting up to take on the issue. Many of these companies are developing products and services that are still undergoing clinical trials, but for many the results have been promising.

Though, it is important to point out that a lot of these companies are developing procedures that involve implanting hair, which means there is a chance they will be expensive — as we mentioned before, traditional hair transplants are costly. But a few companies and products such as Follicum’s FOL-S-005 and Fidia Pharma’s Brotzu Lotion are being designed as topical treatments.

We won't know for sure if these products and services are effective until clinical trials finish. In addition, it is a good idea to wait for results from separate clinical studies that support the claims made by each company. But we'll keep an ear to the ground as new research or treatments emerge.

The Bottom Line

The earlier you begin treating hair loss, the more effective the treatment will be. Androgenetic alopecia is a condition that gradually worsens over time, so the general rule is that the earlier you seek treatment, the better. "If you're losing your hair and you have genetic hair loss, using medication such as Propecia or minoxidil is most effective when started early," says Dr. Robert M. Bernstein, Dr. Wolfeld's colleague at Bernstein Medical – Center for Hair Restoration. Because not everyone loses hair on the same timeline, you can't rely on statistics to tell you when you should start treatment. Some men start to notice thinning in their early 20s, while others maintain a thick head of hair well into their 50s. If you suspect that you're starting to lose your hair and want it to stop, act quickly.

Our Hair Loss Treatment Review: Summed Up

Hair Loss Treatment	The Best
Men's Rogaine Unscented Foam	Overall for Men <i>and</i> Women
Kirkland Signature Regrowth Treatment Minoxidil Foam for Men	Generic Runner-Up
Equate Hair Regrowth Treatment for Men	Generic Runner-Up
HairMax Professional 12 LaserComb	Supplemental Treatment

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