Bald Science: New Options for Men Losing Their Hair

For years, men who were losing their hair had only one option: commit to a daily combo of Rogaine and Propecia for life and hope for the best. Those who were already balding could spend a small fortune on plugs, shave their heads, or, well, deal with it. Nearly 50 million men have hereditary hair loss, and according to the American Academy of Dermatology, half of all guys will develop the condition by the time they’re 50.

So why don’t we have a solution for going bald? “Keeping hair on all heads is a tall order, because it’s not just fixing hormones, or genetics or nutrients — the process of hair growth is a multifunctional cycle of growth, loss and regrowth, and it’s a different cycle for each individual,” says Dr. Paul Jarod Frank, a dermatologist in New York City. And while there’s still no magic pill to suddenly transform a bare head, there are cutting edge innovations that doctors say could keep the hair you do have, and bring some follicles back to life.

Going Off-Label

You may have heard of Latisse, an RX-only wonder-liquid that takes the eyelashes of its primarily female fan club to thick, Bambi-like lengths. Now researchers are looking to harness the ability of its active ingredient, bimatoprost, to create new strands on the scalp. Currently, the only FDA-approved topical treatment is Rogaine (and why it’s been the gold standard for 17 years), which "contains a growth factor that keeps strands in an active-growth phase for longer," says Leavitt. Great for Keeping the hair you have, not so effective at getting more of it. A Latisse for the scalp “could potentially be the biggest topical breakthrough for hair loss since Rogaine — but far more effective, and the logical next step,” says Frank.

Allergan, the makers of Latisse, are starting a second round of clinical trials now to aim to get an FDA-approved version to market (some doctors put the timeline at around two years from now). In the meantime, dermatologists have found another solution: use the current Latisse off-label. Frank says he often tells patients to apply the eyelash-growing cream to their scalp — Frank goops it on his own thinning hair — though it’s a pricey option; the tiny tubes of lash-sprouting Latisse only contain some 3 ounces of formula. “For now, it is an expensive endeavor for those willing to experiment,” he says. “But the fact that we know it works is huge — it’s just a matter of getting similar results for a formula for the scalp.”