



TOP 4 UNUSUAL HAIR TRANSPLANT PROCEDURES

Think hair transplants are only for bald people? Think again. **Nur Akmar Yusoff** discovers the less conventional occasions for a hair transplant.



American hair transplant surgeon Dr. Marc Dauer says non-conventional hair transplant procedures have been performed in the last decade or so.

Hair transplants have been the preferred choice for permanent hair restoration for decades, allowing men and women who suffer from hair loss to restore their crowning glory. Although hair transplantation into the scalp remains a popular procedure, thanks to advances in technology, it is now possible to have hair transplanted into other parts of the body as well.

“Most people are unaware that these possibilities exist in the field of hair restoration but these types of procedures have been performed in the last decade or so. This is due to the newest techniques in hair restoration which have allowed us to perfect these applications over the years,” says Los Angeles-based hair transplant surgeon and Diplomate of the American Board of Hair Restoration Surgery, Dr. Marc Dauer. Dr. Dauer was in Malaysia in July to present a seminar on hair transplantation.

Apart from cosmetic purposes, hair transplantation is also used for corrective reasons – and beyond. Dr. Dauer shares with us the top four non-conventional hair transplant procedures that he frequently performs in his practice.

EYEBROW TRANSPLANTATION

According to Dr. Dauer, eyebrow transplantation is a relatively new innovation in hair restoration, which involves harvesting single hair follicles from the occipital scalp (located just behind the ear) where they most likely resemble natural eyebrow hair.

“This procedure can be used to strengthen genetically weak eyebrows, or to cover a scar in an eyebrow,” says Dr. Dauer. “Physical trauma such as burns or cuts, medical treatments such as chemotherapy or radiation therapy, excessive plucking, and even menopause, can all contribute to eyebrow hair loss. In the past, some people opted for eyebrow tattoos to recreate lost eyebrow hair, but tattoos can be obvious and look unnatural. There is no better replacement for eyebrow hair than hair itself, and hairs can be transplanted over eyebrow tattoos to recreate natural looking eyebrows.”

Before the procedure, Dr. Dauer draws in the shape of the new eyebrows on his patients. Once the patient agrees with the new look, Dr. Dauer takes a small strip of hair from the occipital scalp and dissects it into individual hairs (a method called strip harvesting). He then uses a needle tip to make small holes on the eyebrow site where the hairs are to be transplanted and carefully places these hair follicles in the same direction as the native eyebrow hair to create a natural look.

Dr. Dauer says complications from this procedure are rare, the most common one being a small area of purplish discoloration under the eyelids, which will disappear after a few days. For four to five days following the procedure, tiny scabs that look like dots of sand will appear on the skin at the transplant sites. These scabs then fall off and the new eyebrow hair will begin to grow around two to three months later. Full growth is usually seen approximately nine months after the procedure.

“Once the new eyebrow hair grows in, it is completely indistinguishable from native eyebrow hair and can be treated in exactly the same ways. I have many patients who are completely satisfied after one procedure, and others who opt for a touch up to provide some increased density,” comments Dr. Dauer. “The only caveat with this procedure is that the transplanted hairs will continue to grow like scalp hairs, so periodic trimming (usually once a week) is required for the rest of the patient’s life.”

FOR SURGICAL SCARRING

Dr. Dauer routinely performs hair transplants to cover surgical scars that result from burns, skin grafting, traumatic lacerations, cranial surgery (where the bone flap is temporarily removed from the skull to access the brain) and previous plastic surgery procedures.

“The most common cases that I treat are the loss of sideburns after face lift procedures. I have also treated patients who underwent previous brow lift procedures where their hairlines were

brought up too high, or a scar was left in front of the hairline,” explains Dr. Dauer.

In all these cases, the donor hair is used to cover the scarring areas, which include sideburns, the scalp, moustache and beard. Dr. Dauer says this procedure provides good growth and hair density because of the rich supply of blood to the face and scalp, allowing the hair transplants to grow well through scars in these areas. It usually takes one or two procedures to completely conceal a scar but Dr. Dauer says it is crucial that the scar has enough time to heal before the procedure is performed.

“Usually, it takes a scar two to three months to heal properly and at that point it would be possible to transplant hair into it,” states Dr. Dauer. “The newly transplanted hairs may take a little longer to grow since they have to do so through a scar. Furthermore, the yield of these transplanted hairs may be a little lower than hair transplants that grow in a normal scalp, where the yield is typically over 90 percent. However, the end results are still very dramatic and natural looking, with complete coverage of the pre-existing scars.”

According to Dr. Dauer, there is little or no bruising at the transplant site post-procedure, only a small to moderate amount of swelling which usually resolves within four to five days.

FOR TRANSEXUAL PATIENTS

Hair transplantation can also provide a natural and significant change of appearance for transsexual patients. Designing a brand new hairline for these patients requires two key factors according to Dr. Dauer.

“The surgeon must understand not only the different anatomical facial structures between men and women, but their different hairline structures as well. The relationship between gender-specific hairline and facial structure is of utmost importance in planning these procedures,” he says.

For men, maturation of the hairline can lead to recession of the frontal corners, which causes the face to appear more masculine. To achieve a softer, more feminine look for his male-to-female patients, Dr. Dauer transplants hair to the frontal hairline and the temporal peaks (triangular tufts



A patient after having 483 follicular grafts transplanted into a scar due to previous surgery.



A patient after having 56 follicular grafts transplanted into a scar in the eyebrow.



A female-to-male patient suffering from male pattern thinning, and six months after hair transplantation.

of hair extending into the sides of the forehead), bringing the hairline forward and giving it a more rounded shape. He adds that the combination of minoxidil (a topical medication) and finasteride (an oral drug) works best to help slow down the rate of male pattern hair loss and stimulate hair growth, thus benefiting the transplant and patient as well.

Female-to-male patients are usually on large amounts of testosterone which causes male pattern hair loss, especially in the hairline regions. Dr. Dauer usually transplants hairs into these thinned out areas to create a strong male hairline.

"I also transplant hairs into the moustache and beard regions which work well to make the individual appear more masculine," adds Dr. Dauer.

BODY HAIR TRANSPLANTS

While most people desire a smooth, hairless body, there are those who don't mind being hairy at all. At Dr. Dauer's clinic, some patients request for hair to be transplanted into various parts of their body, particularly the chest and pubic regions. These requests may seem a little odd, but the reasons behind them are highly personal to the patients.

"Patients never tell me their motives. In one case, however, a patient had been with a boyfriend who had asked her to remove her pubic hair using a laser. In transplanting hair back into her pubic region, it may have been a subconscious decision to get rid of the memory of that relationship," states Dr. Dauer.

Unsurprisingly, all of the patients who ask for chest hair transplants are men, while requests for pubic hair transplants are strictly from women. Since most of his male patients are bare-chested, Dr. Dauer usually creates a whole new set of chest hair for them, whereas for female patients, hair is transplanted into the pubic region to increase the density of existing hair in that area.

The transplanted hairs tend to fall out around two weeks after the procedure, but will start to re-grow in three months. These permanent hairs will then continue to grow, requiring trimming every few months or so.

HAIRY SENSATION

Hair transplantation involves minimal pain, especially with the technique used by Dr. Dauer.

"For all the hair transplant methods, I use a vibrating mechanism when administering local anaesthesia to patients. Because the brain perceives vibratory sensations faster than painful sensations, the vibrations greatly decrease the discomfort associated with the injections. Once the numbing injections are complete, the patient should then be pain-free for the total duration of the operation," explains Dr. Dauer.

While each procedure can take four to nine hours to complete, Dr. Dauer says the patient is able to watch television and movies, read, or talk on the phone during the entire operation. Following the procedure, patients can expect minimal discomfort for one to three days but there are steps they can take which will ease their discomfort when adapting to their new hair.

"Patients should not do strenuous exercise for one week post-operatively but they may resume normal activities once that period is over," advises Dr. Dauer.

"Hair should be washed by gently pouring water over the treated areas for one week and after that they may wash their hair normally," he adds.

Hair transplant itself might not cause a lot of pain, but it might hurt your pocket. The total cost for eyebrow transplants is US\$4500 while other hair transplant procedures are priced at

ABOUT FOLLICULAR UNIT TRANSPLANTATION

Follicular Unit Transplantation (FUT) is considered today's gold standard for permanent hair restoration. This surgical procedure utilises the follicular unit, a naturally occurring group of one, two, three or four hair follicles from the back or the sides of the patient's own scalp. The donor hairs are harvested by either the strip harvesting method, which means removing a small strip of hair that is then dissected into hundreds of follicular units; or follicular unit extraction, which entails removing each follicular unit individually using specialised instruments of 0.7 to 1.2 millimetres in size. These follicular units or 'micro-grafts' are then placed into the recipient site in a pattern that provides a subtle and natural appearance.

Malaysian physician Dr. Jasvinder Singh, who specialises in the anti-aging and aesthetic fields, says FUT is the preferred method of hair transplant for most of his patients.

"FUT has been practised for some time now and the technology has improved with the usage of stereomicroscope magnification, a relatively new technology which allows for more precise follicular grafts. Magnification, illumination, fine instruments and sharp blades are critical to a successful outcome in FUT," states Dr. Jasvinder, who received his training at the American Academy of Aesthetic Medicine.

He adds that hair transplant procedures are increasing in popularity in Malaysia, as more people seek to enhance their appearance and gain self-confidence.

"Apart from conventional hair restoration, hair transplantation can also be useful for a number of corrective reasons. In my practice, I have used FUT to camouflage scars over the eyebrows caused by sports injuries. FUT is also helpful in disguising pre-existing scars and in cases of post-surgical scarring alopecia," says Dr. Jasvinder.

Dr. Jasvinder thinks that the popularity of these 'non-conventional' procedures will continue to rise once the public becomes more aware of other 'services' that hair transplantation can offer.



Dr. Jasvinder Singh says FUT is the preferred method of hair transplant.

about US\$4 to US\$8 per graft, depending on the number of grafts and types of harvesting method (the strip method is more expensive than the follicular unit extraction).

"The number of grafts needed depends on the area to be filled with hair and the amount of pre-existing hair that is present. In general, I try to achieve densities between 25 to 35 follicles per square centimetre," says Dr. Dauer, adding that as the graft count increases, the price per graft decreases.

Before splashing out the cash, patients must remember that not everyone is suitable for hair transplantation. An ideal candidate needs to have good hair density in the back and sides of the head. These regions are the typical donor areas for hair transplantation as they are not susceptible to genetic hair loss, causing permanent results once the hairs are transplanted into recipient sites. However, patients who suffer from alopecia areata (an autoimmune disease which causes hair to fall out) or hypothyroidism (inability of the thyroid glands to produce hormones that are responsible for hair growth) should have these conditions treated first as they cause hair loss. 🇲🇾