

Crowning glory

A good hair transplant can help boost confidence and self-esteem.

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MOST people have the common perception that hair transplant is purely a cosmetic procedure, that those who go through it just want to look good or hide a bald patch. But consider people who have burns or scars, and need to hide them with hair. Hair transplant does not only involve the hair on one's head; it can also be eyebrows, a moustache or body hair.

American hair transplant surgeon Dr Marc Dauer, who was recently in Kuala Lumpur to perform a hair transplant at Health Pathway, a holistic healthcare provider, explained that there's more to hair transplant than vanity.

"There are many different reasons for undergoing a hair transplant procedure," said Dr Dauer. "Aesthetic considerations are but one component of hair restoration. Hair is youthfulness, confidence. For men and women, the loss of hair, whether it's on the head or eyebrows, it can be distressing."

By having his or her hair restored in a natural way, the person's confidence and self-esteem are also restored. It has a major impact, not only on the individual's perception of himself or herself, but also on people's perception of them as well, said Dr Dauer.

"Hair restoration is not purely cosmetic," he added. "There are corrective reasons for doing it: surgical scars or burns. Conditions of that nature that can be corrected with hair transplant are very common."

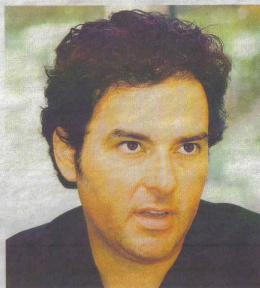
Although the hair on the head is certainly the most common reason for hair transplant, eyebrows have also become very common recently. The more people find out about the ability to conceal a scar with hair, the more people are seeking out hair transplantation for those purposes.

Dr Dauer, who is based in Los Angeles, has performed hair transplants on Hollywood celebrities and is a graduate of New York Medical College, trained in the Department of Head and Neck Surgery at UCLA Medical Center. He is also a teacher and author, a Diplomate of the American Board of Hair Restoration Surgery and a member of the International Society of Hair Restoration Surgery.

He uses follicular unit transplantation, which is considered the gold standard of hair transplant techniques. The traditional hair transplant procedure involves transferring hair from a permanent area of the scalp to an area where hair has been lost. The permanent hair on the sides and back of the head is harvested as a narrow strip of hair.

"That little strip is approximated

More than deft hands: Hair transplant is an art, and the surgeon needs to have an innate artistic eye.



with sutures, and the patient is left with a tiny 1mm to 2mm scar that's completely concealed by the patient's hair," explained Dr Dauer. "Then there's follicular unit extraction. That is where we extract a single follicle at a time."

There are benefits and disadvantages to both procedures. "The benefit of the follicular unit extraction is that the patient doesn't need sutures," said Dr Dauer. "The disadvantage is that instead of forming a tiny scar, it forms hundreds to thousands of tiny scars. Every time you extract a follicle, you form a tiny scar."

Follicular unit extraction is also more time-consuming as a surgeon is limited by the number of follicles that can be transferred on any given day. So, for patients who wish to have two or three thousand follicles transplanted in a single day — which could be 6,000 to 7,000 hairs, because each follicle averages 2.2 to 2.3 hairs — follicular unit extraction is not an option, said Dr Dauer.

"Personally I would recommend follicular unit extraction to patients who are doing smaller cases," he added. "But if a patient desires a large case done in one day, then I'd recommend the strip method."

The biggest misconception about hair transplant, he said, is that it provides an unnatural appearance.

"This is because you only notice the bad hair transplants, and you

don't notice the good hair transplants, which is the whole point," he said.

In reality, the newly transplanted hair that grows can be washed, cut, styled, permed and even coloured. The look also depends on the artistry of the surgeon.

"Creating the hairline is really an artistic-based procedure as you are creating an individual's hairline at a time when it does not exist," said Dr Dauer. "So it's important that you create something that doesn't appear linear. It has to be 'irregularly irregular' and suit the individual's face."

And how long does it take for a surgeon to learn and master this art?

"It's different for every individual," Dr Dauer replied. "You must possess an innate artistic eye. Parts of it cannot be taught; they must just be innate in an individual. But as far as how many cases does it take to become comfortable and confident for a hair-transplant surgeon, I think it could take hundreds of cases."

According to Dr Dauer, the procedure is completely safe, with no bleeding or risk of infection. There could be minimal bleeding in the donor area on the first night but there is none in the recipient area.

"The scalp has an incredible blood supply which nourishes the follicles, which is why this proce-

dures is so effective," he explained. "The same concept that provides blood supply and nourishment to the follicles is the same reason why the risk of infection is very low."

And other than preventing direct sunlight on the healing areas, for example by wearing a hat, there is no other precautions to take after a procedure. In fact, Dr Dauer said he has had patients who go back to work the very next day.

"Anyone can undergo a hair transplant procedure. The only thing is that patients under the age of 25 who have severe balding should not have transplants until they are into their 30s. This is to assess the patient's future degree of baldness in order to assess how many donor grafts they will have to donate to the areas that need it."

Hair transplant, which started in the 50s, has become highly refined and gone through many subtle improvements.

There is now a solution to prevent post-operative swelling, and blades that are used to make the receptive sites for the transplanted hair are now custom-made to match the individual's hair characteristics and size.

"I think the next big step on the horizon is the ability to clone an individual's hair," said Dr Dauer. "I still think we're years away from that, but when it occurs, it will completely change the whole field."



(Pic top) The biggest misconception about hair transplant is that it provides an unnatural appearance.

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