Is My Hair Thinning Because of RA?

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Rheumatoid Arthritis and Hair Loss

Most people don't put hair loss down to their rheumatoid arthritis (RA), but often times it is. Hair loss can occur because of the immune system's attack on skin and the hair follicles, or as a result of medications used to treat RA. Common medications with this side effect are:

- **DMARDs –** DMARD stands for disease-modifying anti-rheumatic drug and it controls RA by suppressing the immune system. Hair loss is a side effect with some DMARDs. Methotrexate is often the DMARD that is prescribed for RA and it can cause hair loss in some patients.
- **Biologics –** Biologics work by reducing the inflammation caused by the immune system's attack. Certain biologics, like etanercept, can causing hair thinning. It's not serious, however, and hair will begin to grow in again when the drug is no longer being taken.

How to Handle Rheumatoid Arthritis and Hair Loss

Fortunately, if your RA does cause hair loss, it isn't severe – usually you'll notice thinning of the hair rather than patches of it coming out. Here are some steps you can take to minimize hair loss and cope with thinning hair, regardless of the cause:

- Take care not to overwork your hair. It is best to let it air dry and use a wide-toothed comb to remove tangles. A leave-in conditioner will help with combing through your hair without pulling any of it out.
- Purchase hair products that give hair more volume, and avoid any products that weigh down hair, such as heavy conditioners.

- Use the right tools for your hair. Invest in some smooth or rubber rollers to use for more curl and volume and throw out those Velcro rollers that grab at hair and pull it out. Consider using end papers that beauticians use to help protect the fragile ends of the hair.
- Stay away from heavy mousses and gels that make your hair stiff and easier to break. Do not pull your hair into a ponytail or other style that pulls your hair tightly from the scalp, as this can cause breakage.
- You may want to check out hair extensions for a fuller look. You can try out clip-in extensions in your own natural color or be different and try some other colors. Many of these extensions are inexpensive and comfortable. You may also try the various hairpieces that go onto the crown of your head and blend in with the rest of your hair. However, do not get the kind that glue or sew in, as they can be very damaging to your hair.
- Don't stop taking your medication if you suspect it is causing your hair loss. If you're concerned about RA medication side effects, talk to your doctor.