

ROAD TEST

THROUGH THICK & THIN

Suffering from female-pattern hair loss, Ning Chao jets to Copenhagen to test a treatment that may finally offer a cure

Like the sunspots freckling my cheeks or my mascara-averse monolids, my thinning hair was just another insecurity I accepted as part of my personal beauty baggage. But I'm not alone in my fear of going bald; according to the American Hair Loss Association, 40 percent of hair-loss sufferers in the U.S. are women.

Stress, illness, and diet can all contribute to abnormal shedding, but female-pattern hair loss (FPHL) is the most common culprit, affecting 40 percent of women by age 50—and what I was diagnosed with 10 years ago. “More than half of the women I treat for hair loss have FPHL,” estimates New Orleans dermatologist Dr. Nicole Rogers, who specializes in hair-restoration treatments. DNA plays a key role: If either side of your family tree has hair-loss issues, you're at risk. FPHL results from chronic hair follicle shrinkage and shorter hair-growth cycles. “Instead of growing five to seven years, strands grow three to five or even one to three years. Tiny hairs may only grow a few months before shedding,” Rogers says.

Over the years, I've tried almost every treatment available, and while some offered improvement, none has fully restored my youthful thickness. The regimen that worked best for me was topical minoxidil (the active ingredient in Rogaine). I've also tried the prescription drugs spironolactone and Avodart; however, both those medications are controversial for use in women of childbearing age because they can cause birth defects. Seeking a more natural solution, I visit Harklinikken, a Copenhagen hair-loss clinic (*Harklinikken* means “hair clinic” in Danish) with a tony client roster of royals and celebrities. There, I meet with Lars Skjoth, who founded Harklinikken 37 years ago and just launched harklinikken.com's online service, so anyone with an Internet connection and camera can get help.

Skjoth explains that my widow's peak camouflages my thinning in front (apparently, this version of a “comb-over” and my liberal use of Oribe Dry Texturizing Spray are why I've been able to hide my secret). But it's time to confront the bald truth: On the Savin hair-loss scale of D1 to D7 (with D7 being the worst), I'm a D5.5. If I don't do something soon, I may never grow back enough hairs to cover my scalp. Thankfully, Skjoth decides I am a candidate for Harklinikken's treatment and predicts I will see a 35 percent improvement in a year, provided I comply with the daily regimen.

I start using the Harklinikken pH shampoo and “Extract”



Forty percent of women are dealing with hair loss by age 50

daily. Extract is the cornerstone of the treatment protocol and is individually formulated for each client using ingredients such as fermented plant extracts, milk, and yeast enzymes—all safe for pregnant women. The formula is adjusted with every refill (one \$78 bottle lasts a month) to maximize results.

After a few weeks, my hair is lighter in color and growing quicker than normal. After a month, I also notice it's falling out faster, which my hairstylist, Spoke & Weal salon founder Jon Reyman, confirms. He suspects that my strands look lighter because my hair has become so sheer you can see more of my scalp! Horrified, I crop my locks into a short bob (to maximize the illusion of fullness) and confront Skjoth, who assures me this initial increase in shedding is normal, as my growth cycle speeds up and new, strong hairs push out weak, thin strands.

Sure enough, by the second month, the “mass exodus of hair,” as Reyman described it, has stopped and I see a bunch of baby hairs, especially in the sheer spots. After three months, Skjoth does a quick scan of my scalp while he's in Los Angeles (new Harklinikken clinics in NYC and L.A. are in the pipeline) and says I should be able to do even better than a 35 percent improvement. I visit Reyman for a cut and he agrees that my hair looks thicker. My personal sign the treatment's a success? I'm no longer self-conscious that my scalp is showing. If people glance my way, I'm confident they're noticing my hairstyle or my face—which reminds me, it's time to laser those freckles. **mc**

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