

Hair loss after bariatric surgery

A patient guide for Southern Weight Loss patients

Introduction

Hair shedding after bariatric surgery can feel confronting, especially when you have worked hard to improve your health.

The important message is this:

Post-operative hair loss is common, temporary, and almost always reversible.

This guide explains why it happens, what to expect, and what you can do to support recovery.

What is happening?

The most common cause of hair loss after bariatric surgery is a condition called **Telogen effluvium**.

Hair grows in cycles:

- **Anagen** – active growth phase
- **Catagen** – transition phase
- **Telogen** – resting phase before shedding

After a major physiological stress, such as surgery or rapid weight loss, a higher proportion of hairs shift into the telogen (resting) phase at the same time.

Three to four months later, those hairs shed together.

The hair follicle itself remains healthy. It has not died. It is simply resetting.

Why does it happen after bariatric surgery?

Hair shedding is usually multifactorial. Contributing factors may include:

1. Rapid weight loss

Significant metabolic change signals the body to prioritise essential organs over hair growth.

2. Reduced calorie intake

Early post-operative nutrition is intentionally restricted to allow healing.

3. Protein insufficiency

Hair is primarily made of keratin, a protein. Inadequate protein intake increases shedding risk.

4. Micronutrient deficiencies

Low levels of:

- Iron
- Zinc
- Vitamin B12
- Folate
- Occasionally copper

can worsen or prolong shedding.

5. Surgical stress

Any major surgery can trigger telogen effluvium, this is not unique to bariatric procedures.

When does it occur?

Typical timeline:

- **0–3 months:** Hair usually appears normal
- **3–4 months:** Shedding begins
- **4–6 months:** Peak shedding
- **6–9 months:** Gradual improvement
- **9–12 months:** Visible regrowth
- **By 12 months:** Most patients return to baseline thickness

This pattern is consistent whether you have had a sleeve gastrectomy or gastric bypass.

How common is it?

Studies suggest that 30–50% of patients notice some degree of increased shedding after bariatric surgery.

Not everyone experiences it — and the severity varies.

Is it permanent?

In the vast majority of cases: **No**.

Permanent hair loss after bariatric surgery is rare and usually associated with:

- Severe protein malnutrition
- Untreated micronutrient deficiencies
- Underlying thyroid disease
- Genetic pattern hair loss unmasked by weight loss

With appropriate nutrition and follow-up, regrowth is expected.

What you can do

1. Prioritise protein

Most Southern Weight Loss patients should aim for:

- **Women:** 60–80g protein per day
- **Men:** 80–100g protein per day

(Individual targets may vary based on body size and procedure.)

Practical tips:

- Protein first at every meal
- Use high-quality protein supplements if intake is limited
- Track intake during high-risk months (3–6 months post-op)

2. Take your bariatric multivitamin consistently

A complete bariatric-specific multivitamin should include:

- Iron
- Zinc
- Vitamin B12
- Folate
- Fat-soluble vitamins (if bypass)

Missed doses increase deficiency risk.

3. Have blood tests as scheduled

Routine monitoring typically includes:

- Full blood count

- Ferritin
- B12
- Folate
- Zinc (if shedding significant)
- Vitamin D
- Albumin

If shedding is prolonged, we may also check thyroid function.

4. Avoid additional crash dieting

Hair loss risk increases if calorie intake is further restricted beyond recommended post-operative guidance.

5. Be gentle with your hair

During peak shedding:

- Avoid tight hairstyles
- Limit heat styling
- Avoid chemical treatments
- Use gentle brushing

This does not stop telogen effluvium but reduces breakage.

What about biotin?

Biotin deficiency is rare. Routine high-dose biotin supplementation is not universally required unless deficiency is identified.

Excess biotin can interfere with certain blood tests, including thyroid markers.

When should I contact the clinic?

Please seek review if you experience:

- Shedding lasting beyond 12 months
- Patchy hair loss
- Symptoms of anaemia (fatigue, dizziness)
- Signs of protein deficiency (muscle loss, swelling)
- Significant dietary intolerance

We are here to support you.

The bigger picture

Hair growth is metabolically “optional.”

Your body is prioritising healing, metabolic improvement, and long-term health.

During the same period that shedding occurs, many patients are experiencing:

- Improved insulin sensitivity
- Reduced blood pressure
- Lower inflammation
- Better mobility
- Improved sleep

Temporary shedding does not erase these gains.

Reassurance

Hair shedding after bariatric surgery is:

- ✓ Common
- ✓ Predictable
- ✓ Temporary
- ✓ Recoverable

You have made a significant investment in your future health.

Your body is adapting, and it will stabilise.

Southern Weight Loss

Dunedin | Otago | Southland

If you are concerned about hair shedding or nutrition, contact our team to arrange review and blood testing.

This guide is for general education. Individual recommendations may vary. Always follow the advice provided by your surgeon and bariatric dietitian.