

"I feel beautiful again!"

When her hair began falling out, 28-year-old Karen Diamond tried to tell herself it was just stress. But soon, she knew the terrible truth: she was going bald!

I stood in front of my bathroom mirror, comb and brush in my hand. But as I raised them to my head, I suddenly stopped. It's no use, I sighed, dropping my arms. There's no way I'm going to be able to hide it anymore.

As I stared at my reflection, it was painfully clear: I'm going bald! I trembled.

An embarrassing secret

Like most girls, from the time I could climb up on the bathroom vanity, I loved fussing with my hair. When I was in high school, I even did hair modeling for a magazine!

Then, as I entered my 20s . . . What's going on? I worried as I found myself cleaning hair out of the shower drain and my brush. I'd heard stress could wreak havoc on hair. I'd just gotten out of college and was job hunting. My nerves were a bit frazzled. That has to be it, I told myself.

But even after I landed a good job, it continued. Why is this happening? I cringed.

Every morning, when I shampooed, I'd end up with a big handful of hair. I was horrified!

I was working as a producer at a TV station at the time, and, ironically, we happened to do a story about female hair loss.

I was shocked to learn that

40% of all women suffer from hair loss! After the program aired, our switchboard lit up! But no light bulb went off in my head. The women in the program had bald patches. That's not me, I told myself. I'm just going through a bad phase.

Besides, I couldn't let anyone know. Even working behind the cameras, in my business, appearance was everything.

Hoping that taking weight off the roots would help, I cut my hair short. I started using special shampoos

and conditioners. I tried every product and trick touted on every infomercial.

But as the months went by, my hair

kept falling out. One summer day, I came home to find my scalp sunburned!

People will notice! I shuddered, ashamed. I couldn't bear the thought of anyone—even family—discovering my secret.

Mornings were torture. I'd get up early and use anything and everything to make my hair look fuller . . . heated brushes, curling irons, root lifters, waxes, sprays . . .

Preparing for a date was even more nerve-wracking. No matter what I did, I just didn't feel pretty or feminine anymore.

I'd always enjoyed dressing in skirts and bright colors. But I started wear-



ing more pants and brown and black.

My mood grew dark, too. I was miserable. My hair was always on my mind.

Now as I gazed at myself, I gasped. I could actually see the whole crown of my head!

I can't live like this anymore! I wept.

A surprising solution

My mom had always been my best friend. Yet, I was so embarrassed, I could barely get the words out when I told her.

But she just looked at me with love and said, "I know. I just didn't want to make you feel bad."

Together, we went to see Dr. Alan Bauman in Boca Raton, Florida, who specializes in women's hair loss.

He nodded when I told him that my dad and both of his brothers were bald. And after a microscopic examination of my hair . . . "Your problem is genetic," Dr. Bauman said. "And I'm afraid it's

going to get worse."

I felt sick to my stomach. I'm going to be bald?

"There are things that can help," Dr. Bauman assured me . . . a wig, Rogaine, laser treatments, supplements . . . But they all required a lifetime of maintenance. I was only 27!

A transplant was the only permanent solution, he said. And it was expensive—\$5,000!

"This is too important. Dad and I will help," my mom immediately offered.

"Thank you," I said.

Not long afterward, I had the procedure. I was awake for the whole thing. The worst part was when Dr. Bauman numbed my head. It's done just like Novocain at the dentist!

After that, I didn't feel a thing as Dr. Bauman removed a section of hair from the back of my head and transplanted it onto my crown. It didn't hurt, but Dr.

Bauman had warned me that my scalp would likely go into shock and the transplanted hair would fall out. "But the follicles will stay and take root," he assured me. "In time, your hair will grow."

But what if it doesn't? I worried, images of the bald women I'd seen in our TV news report flooding back.

A few hours later, I was home. There was soreness, but no real pain. And just as Dr. Bauman predicted, the hair immediately began falling out. Little by little, until one day, after about eight weeks . . .

It's gone! I wept.

Mortified, I hid under hats.

Every day, I'd examine myself in the mirror. Please, let him be right, I prayed. And as the weeks went by, I began to see stubble, and finally . . .

Tears of joy ran down my cheeks as I ran my fingers through my new hair. It was thick, full and all mine!

Today, a year later, if I didn't tell someone, they'd never know I'd had a problem. But I do share my story. I even did a documentary about

myself. I want women to know there are answers. There is hope!

The other day, I was primping in front of the mirror. Suddenly, I stopped and smiled as a wave of gratitude washed over me. I felt . . . beautiful!

Then I slipped on my favorite red dress and rushed off to meet my date!

—Kathy Fitzpatrick

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What to do if your hair is thinning

There are scores of options, says Dr. Alan Bauman, a Boca Raton, Florida, hair-loss specialist. Here's what you can expect from each:

- **Minoxidil (Rogaine):** It plumps and protects, but won't fill bald spots.
- **Pills:** "I prescribe supplements with Viviscal, a marine-derived protein supplement," says Dr. Bauman.
- **Laser:** "It stimulates the follicle to grow," says Dr. Bauman, but won't fill bald spots. Treatments are 15 minutes, two to three times a week.
- **Transplant:** You can see 90% regrowth in a year, but it's pricey.



Do you have a story of hope to share? Please send the details along with your name, address and phone number to: Real-Life Features, *Woman's World*, 270 Sylvan Ave., Englewood Cliffs, NJ 07632. If we print your story, we'll pay you \$250. Submissions may be edited for style.