



HAIR TRANSPLANTS - GROWTH industry

Wayne Rooney... John Cleese... James Nesbitt... Louis Walsh... Gordon Ramsay... Barry from *EastEnders*. It seems like every second celebrity is coming clean about augmenting their natural hairline via the modern miracle that is hair transplant surgery. *Robert Carr* looks at what the process involves, and at the on-going battle against the stigma attached to this and other hair loss treatments

Back in 400BC, Hippocrates, the father of modern medicine, became the first to apply scientific study to the issue of male pattern baldness. He noted that while the men of Ancient Greece all suffered some degree of hair loss, the city's testosterone-free eunuchs seemed immune. Unfortunately, he hadn't a breeze why this would be the case and his observation brought mankind no closer to a solution to the problem.

Fast-forward a couple of wig-covered millennia and for the first time in human history, a treatment that can effectively cure the condition in most cases is finally here – hair transplant surgery.

"The hair at the sides and back of the head is immune to hair loss," Dr Maurice Collins of Hair Restoration Blackrock (HRBR) says of the discovery that underpins the hair transplant process. "If you move these hairs to the front or top of the head, it will grow there permanently. That's the basis of what we do."

Hair transplant surgery, also known as follicular unit transplantation (FUT), can vary slightly in how it is carried out. At HRBR, it involves removing a strip of donor hair from the back of the head. Hair grows naturally in groups of between one and four hairs, and these groups are transplanted individually. So, the donor strip is dissected under a microscope into these follicular units and then painstakingly implanted into incisions made in the area of the patient's head where hair loss is occurring. As the patient's own hair is used in the procedure, the transplants are effectively indistinguishable from existing hair.

While this type of treatment has been available for some time, it exploded onto the collective male consciousness when, having undergone FUT at a clinic in Harley Street, which cost an estimated €37,000, Manchester United and England striker Wayne Rooney proudly shared the news on Twitter.

Posting a picture of his bloodied scalp, the then 26-year-old wrote: "Just to confirm to all my followers I have had a hair transplant. I was going bald at 25 why not. I'm delighted with the result. It's still a bit bruised and swollen when it dies down u will be first to see it. Anyone recommend any good hair gel. Haha (sic)."

While the results of FUT can border on the miraculous – witness, for instance, the now hirsute actor James Nesbitt, whose reclaimed barnet has taken years off him and, according to the Northern Irishman, given him a significant confidence boost – the treatment is not to be considered lightly.

One of the downsides to this type of hair transplant is that it is an extremely labour-intensive process. At HRBR, that means up to 18 people working on a single patient for the best part of a day. Unfortunately, a crew of 18 medical

professionals, headed up by Collins – who is a head and neck specialist surgeon – is never going to come cheap.

The price per transplanted follicular unit graft varies between clinics but is typically in the region of €10 and, to ensure optimum results, you can expect to be counting grafts in the thousands, rather than the hundreds. It makes for some eye-watering maths, but this is the treatment to end all treatments – do it once, and you can forget about going bald for the rest of your life.

The procedure is so effective that numerous celebs have turned up at Dr Collins' clinic seeking to reverse their follicular fortunes. "We operate on a lot of very well-known people," confirms Collins. "I've had a lot of celebrities through our doors that no-one will ever know about."

One satisfied 'customer' who has no qualms about admitting to a hair transplant is *X Factor* judge Louis Walsh.

"Louis came in and said, 'Maurice, I work in a young industry so I need to keep myself [looking] young'," Collins recalls. "I didn't see him on *X Factor* but everyone has been telling me he's looking well."

Walsh, who decided to have the surgery at the prompting of his friend Simon Cowell, has been quite open about the transplant, referring to it as "maintenance", and expressing his delight with the procedure. The Mayo man has even gone as far as recommending the procedure to friends.

"I keep telling Gary (Barlow) he needs it next," Walsh has quipped. "I always clock him glancing at my hair on the show. I'm giving Gary the number so hopefully he can get that bald patch at the back of his head sorted out."

The procedure is carried out with the help of a local anaesthetic similar to the one used by dentists, which makes it completely painless. But while fear of pain is unlikely to keep many men who suffer from hereditary hair loss from walking through Collins' doors, a greater

potential hurdle is the stigma attached to seeking treatment of any kind for baldness, which means there's a humiliation factor for many men to negotiate.

However, Dr Collins believes the way the world views these treatments is slowly beginning to change. "I find that the older age group are still a little secretive but younger men are more open about it."


Collins believes that celebrities who are admitting having hair transplants are playing a key role in making the treatment more socially acceptable. Wayne Rooney may not be everyone's idol but when the footballer told the world about his hair transplant, he brought awareness – even acceptance – of the procedure to a wider audience. "I find that there's a massive change going on in how the treatment is viewed," explains Collins. "More people are talking about it."

He continues, "What Louis [Walsh], James [Nesbitt] and Wayne [Rooney] have done is help remove the stigma that is associated with hair loss," says Collins. "They've said to people, 'Look, if you have an issue with your hair loss then go to a reputable clinic and get it dealt with.'"

Despite the cost involved, the number of men contemplating and researching hair transplants is rapidly growing. The results are undeniably impressive and many of those who have undergone the treatment wax lyrical about their improved confidence and self-esteem, and how it has visually taken years off them.

James Nesbitt, for instance, has been particularly vocal about his treatment, and about the effect it has had on his life. "Several years ago I began losing my hair and like a lot of men it was a major concern to me," explains the actor. "In fact, it was practically an obsession.

"I had a consultation with the surgeon who told me I was a good candidate. Since then I've had two hair transplants and I'm very pleased with the results. I would go as far as to say it has changed my life."

While we are not quite there yet, Collins believes we will eventually reach a point where a problem like hair loss will be viewed in the same way as any other type of condition. "I honestly think that in three to five years' time this will be routine. I don't think that sort of stigma will exist." 

THATCH OF THE DAY

"Some blokes don't mind their hair receding and they're fine with it. But I'll admit I used to stare at myself in the morning and think, 'Bloody hell, you're going bald and you're only a young lad'. You don't want to lose all your hair, certainly not in your 20s anyway.

It never really got me down but I have to admit I did find it a bit stressful. Any fella who's lost his hair will know exactly what I mean. It's not fun. So I thought about what I was going to do about it and started thinking – why not get a hair transplant? After a lot of research, I made an appointment to go through with it and get it done."

WAYNE ROONEY



FACING PAGE:
On me head, son:
Wayne Rooney shows
off his expensively
acquired new 'do.

Need to Know

How many grafts am I going to need?

This varies from patient to patient based on how advanced your hair loss is, how your surgeon sees it progressing over the coming years and on how thick and full you want your hair to be. However, you will be counting grafts in the thousands, rather than in the hundreds.

How much time will I need to take off work?

In addition to the day required to undergo the hair transplant procedure, expect to take an additional three days to recover fully.

How natural will it look? Will people notice I've had something done?

Some hair transplants look better than others but if you go to a reputable clinic with a qualified surgeon, you can expect extremely natural results. It is your own hair being used so it should blend in perfectly. The transplanted hair grows gradually over the course of a year so people will notice an improvement in your appearance, but probably won't be able to pinpoint what it is.

How long will the 'new' hair last?

The transplanted hair is resistant to the balding process so it will last for the rest of your life. However, the hairs that are already on the top of your head will still be vulnerable to thinning.

How long before the results will be evident?

In most cases, transplanted hair follicles begin to grow new hair after about three to five months after surgery. It's normal for initial growth to be quite thin and wispy, but it gets thicker, darker and stronger over time. By the time you hit the one year mark, your transplanted hair will be fully matured.

How long does the procedure take?

Again, it varies depending on how many grafts you're going to get done. That said, it is a painstaking process and an average session of around 1,500 and 3,000 grafts will generally take a full day of surgery. However, you won't have to stay in overnight – hair transplants can be carried out on an outpatient basis.



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CROWNING GLORIES

Louis Walsh

The pop impresario sought help with his hair having been told by Simon Cowell that he was thinning on top. He now boasts hair that certainly has the X Factor.

Jason Donovan

The Australian actor and singer confirmed to Piers Morgan during an interview that he had undergone a hair transplant and is "really happy" with the results. He dismissed vanity as the reason for having the treatment, mentioning how he works in the public eye and "just feels more comfortable with hair".

Gordon Ramsay

It is believed the foul-mouthed foodie was given the same follicular unit extraction treatment as Rooney by hair transplant guru Dr Antonio Amari. He reportedly spent 12 hours having follicles removed from thicker patches of his scalp which were then re-inserted into his thinning hairline.

Jason Gardiner

After years of hiding under hats, the once famously bald *Dancing on Ice* judge forked out an estimated £30,000 for a hair transplant. A self-appointed ambassador for the treatment, he even underwent a second procedure which was broadcast live on the internet.

Suspiciously Luscious Locks

While many celebs are open about their surgically-enhanced tresses, rumours are circulating about resurgent hair growth in a number of other big names who haven't come clean. Have these well-known figures had help from the surgeon's knife? Check out the before-and-after pictures and make up your own mind.

Jude Law

Darker, thicker hair. More coverage on top. A seemingly lower hair-line. Is there more to Law's crowning glory than just careful hair-styling?



Rob Brydon

It wasn't looking good for comedian Brydon on the follicular front until all of a sudden, something happened. Although he had never confirmed whether or not he has had treatment, when asked about the rumours the star joked: "For some time now my head has been feeling a lot warmer but I was unable to put my finger on the reason why."

Elton John

Once famous for his stunningly unconvincing wigs, it appears Sir Elton has suddenly developed a very strong and very real hair line.



Silvio Berlusconi

How did the former Italian prime minister convince a stream of models to turn up at his now legendary bunga-bunga parties? Some people say it was money. We say it was his age-defying hair.

Tom Hanks

When Oscar-winner Tom Hanks was washed up on that desert island in *Castaway*, his hairline looked to be on the turn. Shortly after he escaped on that raft, however, it started to regrow. Coconut milk, perhaps?



Will Young

As the winner of a TV talent competition whose name we've long since forgotten, Young's career was taking off in the early Noughties. Sadly, so too was his hair. These days, after what looks to have been a significant intervention, he has a head like a 21-year-old.

Mel Gibson

With his once generous barnet diminishing faster than the ageing Hollywood heart throb's Jewish fan base, Gibson's previously receding hairline appears to have crept forward while the thinning hair on his crown has become thick and lush. Divine intervention for the *Passion of the Christ* director, or a little surgical help?

