

## Can the ‘vampire face lift’ save you from balding?

Common baldness, medically known as *androgenetic alopecia*, is a prospect that many dread. It is however the commonest form of hair loss seen in clinic and affects men (male pattern balding) and women (female pattern hair loss) alike. It is most associated with the ageing process, but it can also appear at a much earlier age. Hair loss at any age is distressing and with increasing public awareness of treatments for hair loss, it is unsurprising to see a rise in the number of consultations from people of all ages seeking treatment to prevent progression and reverse the signs of baldness.

In common balding, hair follicles inherit a sensitivity to male hormone (androgens) in the body causing progressive shortening of the growth phase – a process known as miniaturisation. These miniaturised hairs

are shorter and finer meaning they cover the scalp less effectively, resulting in thinning and visible scalp through the hair. Men typically have a receding hair line and/or the thinning on the crown, while women tend to have a different pattern with thinning on the crown only and a normal hair line. Contrary to common belief, it is not just passed on from your maternal grandfather. The truth is, androgenetic alopecia (especially when it starts early) anywhere in your family poses a risk.

Commonly used treatments for baldness include topical *Minoxidil*, historically a blood pressure tablet that caused patients to become hairy as a side effect (!) and *Propecia*, a tablet licensed for men, which blocks the effect of androgens on the hair follicles. Some forms of the combined oral contraceptive pill can be protective against hair thinning in women. Hair

transplantation has also gained increasing interest in recent years with notable public figures posting photos of themselves after the procedure with an enviable new hairline.

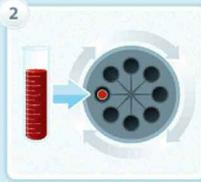
A new treatment that is gaining popularity is platelet-rich plasma (PRP) – a treatment whereby the growth factors in your own blood are extracted from a blood sample taken from the arm (a bit like having a blood test). The portion of blood containing these growth factors is then re-injected to the desired treatment area. PRP is used in several other medical fields namely wound healing, tendon injuries, some forms of arthritis and in facial rejuvenation, coined famously as the ‘vampire face lift’. Lab studies have shown that PRP can re-activate dormant hair follicles and several patient case studies have demonstrated encouraging results with regrowth and thickening of hair. Larger

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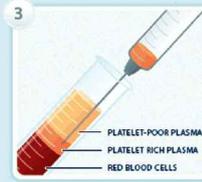
PROCESS OF PRP THERAPY



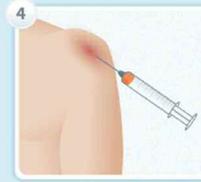
**Collect blood**  
30-60ml of blood is drawn from the patient's arm.



**Separate the platelets**  
The blood is then placed in a centrifuge. The centrifuge spins and separates the platelets from the rest of the blood components.



**Extract platelet-rich plasma**  
Extract 3-6ml of platelet-rich plasma.



**Inject injured area with PRP**  
Using the concentrated platelets, we increase the growth factors up to eight times, which promotes temporary relief and stops inflammation.

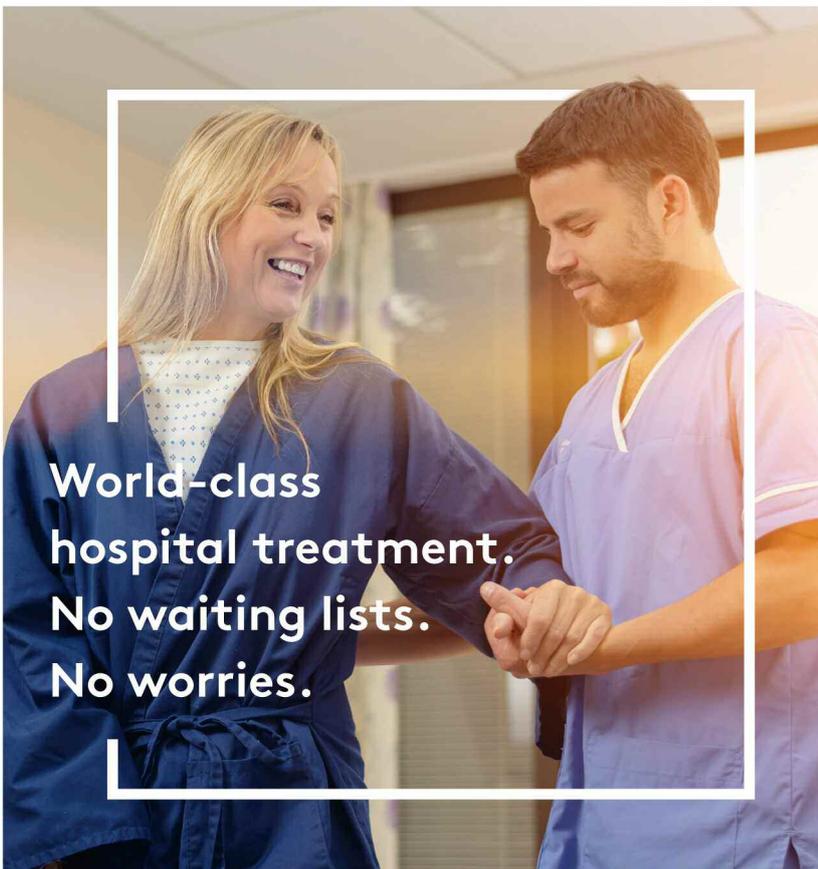
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trials are however needed to establish the efficacy when compared to more established treatments. Although like most treatments for balding, repeated sessions would be required to maintain effect, the main advantage of PRP is its safety profile – the fact that it is not a drug and is derived from your own

blood appeals to many as a low risk alternative treatment to taking life long (usually) hormonal medication.

With the expanding use of PRP to treat a range of medical conditions, perhaps after all, there has always been some truth in the mystical beliefs of the healing properties of blood.

**Dr Sharon Wong** is a UK-trained Consultant Dermatologist. She provides medical and surgical treatments for a comprehensive range of general skin conditions in adults and children. She is also one of few dermatologists in London who specialises in hair and scalp disorders. To book an appointment please call 020 7234 2009 [www.hcatheshard.com](http://www.hcatheshard.com)



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