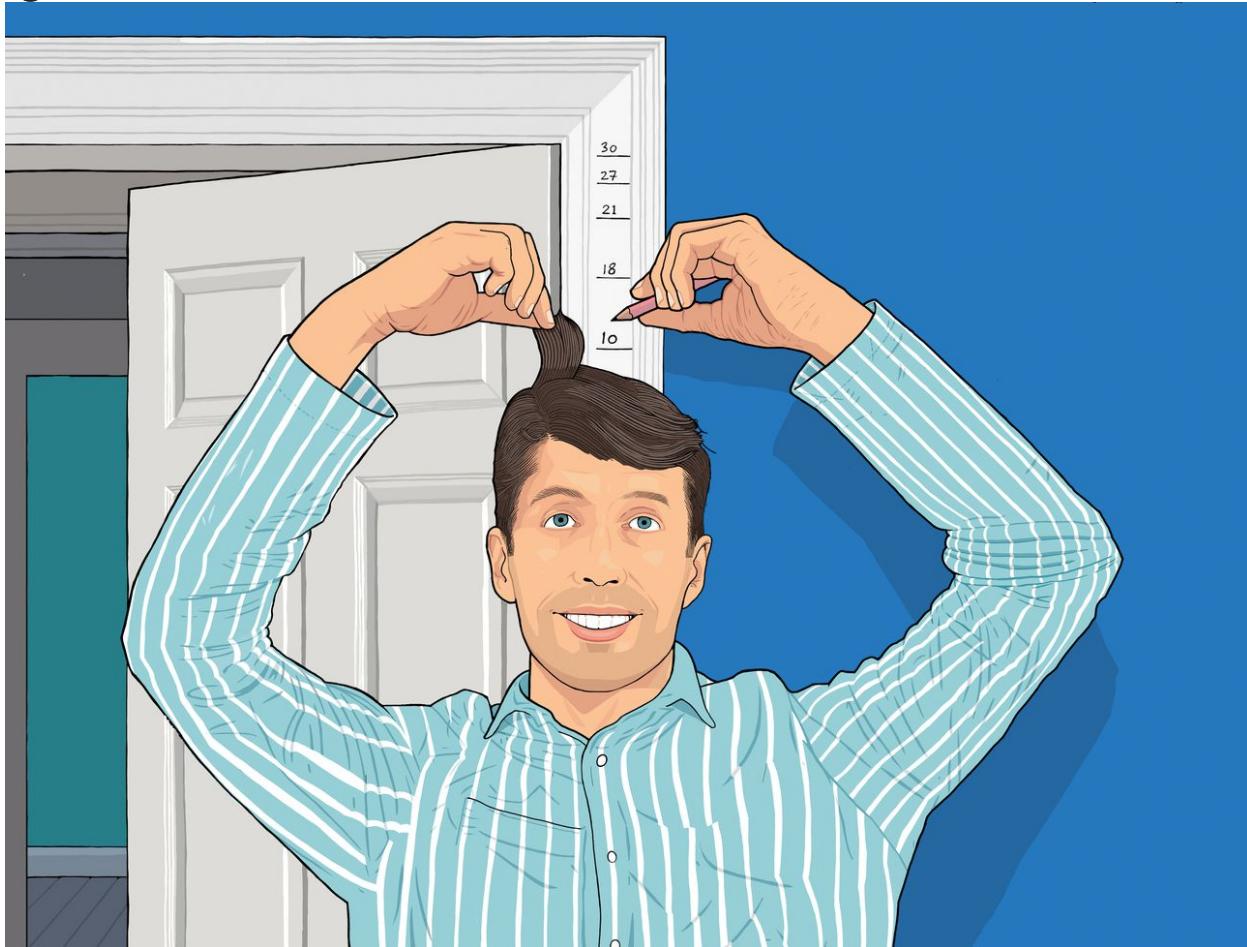


• FASHION

# Comb-Over No More: Why Men's Hair Transplants Are Flourishing

Via (often painful) surgical procedures costing up to \$15,000, more men are using Covid-era downtime to 'grow' new thatches.



GROWTH SPURT: There has been “a big increase in men seeking transplants in the last two years or so,” according to New York plastic surgeon Dr. Gary Linkov.

ILLUSTRATION: JONATHAN ALLARDYCE

*By Horacio Silva*

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**JAMIE CONNORS'S** hairline started betraying him in his mid-20s. Though the Brooklyn video editor, now 36, had flirted with the idea of getting a hair transplant, his follicle fallout never seemed bad enough to warrant such measures. And, besides, how could he take enough time off work to recover away from colleagues' prying eyes?

That all changed during the pandemic. In early 2021, a photo of Mr. Connors made him realize his scalp situation was getting dire. And with no socializing on the books and WFH in full force, he could recuperate covertly on his sofa without wasting sick days. He booked a consultation with Dr. Benjamin Paul, a Manhattan hair surgeon, who recommended Follicular unit extraction (FUE), a procedure that involves harvesting individual follicles from the back of the head and painstakingly replanting them in the front or the crown. It takes between four and eight hours and costs \$11,000-15,000. “I figured I am going to do this right,” said Mr. Connors, who got his new hair several weeks after his initial consultation.

He is among a wave of men who capitalized on Covid-era downtime to acquire fresh shags. Hair transplants—perhaps the male equivalent of women’s pandemic face-lifts—are enjoying a healthy growth spurt. Upon returning to the office, you might find that your colleague has replaced his unconvincing comb-over with a mane that would make Jason Momoa jealous.



Jamie Connors, a 36-year-old Brooklyn video editor, received a hair transplant in March 2021. This grid shows the first year nine months of progress post-transplant.

PHOTO: JAMIE CONNORS

“We have seen a big increase in men seeking transplants in the last two years or so,” said Dr. Gary Linkov, a New York plastic surgeon. And many men, he added, are jetting off to medical-tourism spots like Turkey, Portugal and Panama for bushier new ‘dos. According to market researcher Fortune Business Insights, the global hair-transplant market is predicted to reach \$43.13 billion by 2026, up from 5.94 billion in 2018, a sevenfold surge.

Thinning locks have triggered male anxiety for eons. The Ancient Egyptians painted sparse crowns with a paste concocted from dates, donkey hooves and dog paws in a (charmingly doomed) effort to boost growth. In the 1990s, drugs such as Finasteride and Rogaine started providing hope; more recently, trendy startups like Hims and Nutrafol have launched pills and sprays with purported follicle-enhancing powers.

## You might find your colleague has replaced his comb-over with a Jason Momoa-ish mane.

Although transplants have been performed commercially since the ’50s, they were generally considered too extreme by most men. Various factors are shifting that perception. [The pandemic](#) was [unkind](#) to hairlines: According to the American Academy of Dermatology, Covid—and pandemic-related

stress—caused hair shedding in some folks. And any thinning was magnified by the new Zoom routine: It's harder to ignore those naked temples when you're staring at yourself all day, said Dr. Paul Jarrod Frank, a New York cosmetic dermatologist.

The stigma associated with transplants—and other cosmetic procedures for men—is also lessening, said Dr. Frank. In 2020, actor Cheyenne Jackson documented his transplant journey on Instagram; designer Marc Jacobs has also discussed his reinvigorated thatch in recent years. But not everyone is happy to open up. Some transplant recipients would only speak to us anonymously. And Dr. Frank referenced A-listers who have seemingly enjoyed miraculous hair recoveries lately but have offered no explanation. Nonetheless, he said, regular guys are becoming inspired by “the results these celebrities are getting.”



Designer Marc Jacobs—pictured here in 2017—received a hair transplant in 2010. He described the pain as “excruciating.”

PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

It helps that transplants are improving—even if the most-requested procedure, FUE, isn’t new. It was invented in the ’30s and revived in the early 2000s. Unlike the main alternative—cutting a strip from the back of the head and replanting it into balding areas—FUE leaves no scar. Dr. Paul and others say it achieves the most natural-looking results, with newfangled extractor pens giving surgeons heightened precision.

Still, the transplanted hair can take up to a year to fully set in and thicken. Worse: It’s not a one-and-done fix. Joe Baccan, 31, a salesman in Mahwah, N.J., got a FUE on the front of his scalp in 2015. He’s since returned for three more—to the back of his head and crown—and estimates he’s spent about

\$50,000 in total. Mr. Connors, meanwhile, continues to take Rogaine and Finasteride. “There’s a deep misunderstanding that the transplant is the sole hero in preventing hair loss,” said Dr. Paul, emphasizing that it doesn’t stop hair from thinning in the future.



Actor Cheyenne Jackson—pictured here in 2021—took to Instagram to discuss his five hair transplants.

PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

Is the process of having follicles plucked and replanted into your dome, as if it’s an Amazonian reforestation site, as agonizing as it sounds? “It hurts like hell,” said Mr. Connors, who was left smarting from the 30-plus injections to numb his scalp pre-surgery. Mr. Baccan, however, insisted that his “wasn’t painful at all.”

Yet both were happy with their outcomes. Mr. Connors said his transplant has given him “a real confidence boost.” And both were adamant they would do it all again. If they want to maintain their glorious new manes, there’s a chance they’ll have to.

## FOLLICLE ILLUSIONS

*Don’t want surgery but not prepared to shave your dome or stoop to a toupee? New York strand gurus Takamichi Saeki and Robert McMillen suggest these cuts and styles.*



ILLUSTRATION: JONATHAN ALLARDYCE

## Fade It

If your hair's starting to ghost you, "shorter is probably going to be your friend," said Mr. McMillen. Try a fade on the sides and a tight crop on top.



ILLUSTRATION: JONATHAN ALLARDYCE

## Pump It

Crown balding but front is thicker? "I keep hair tight on the side and do a pompadour," said Mr. Takamichi. Comb back to cover bare spots, then set with spray.

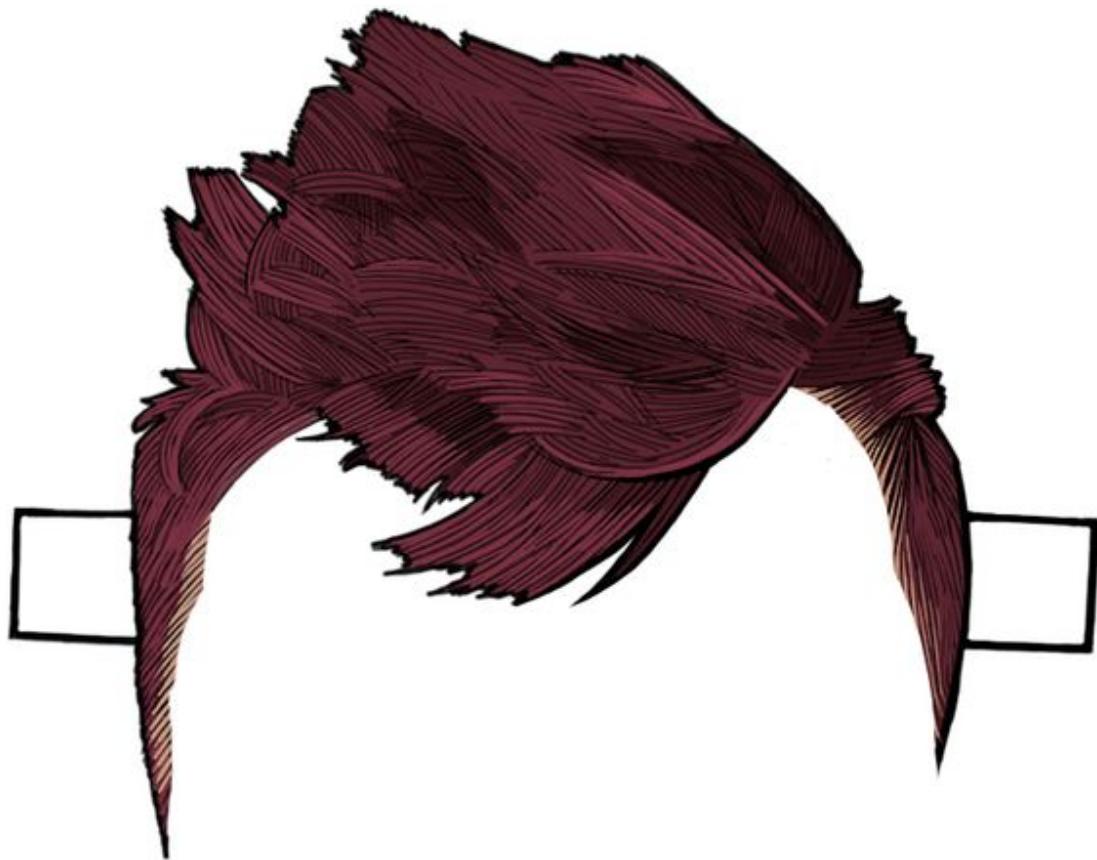


ILLUSTRATION: JONATHAN ALLARDYCE

## Muss It

For a shaggy 'do, said Mr. Takamichi, "I leave everything on the sides and back of the top, even if it's thinning, but I chop and texturize so it looks a bit punk."

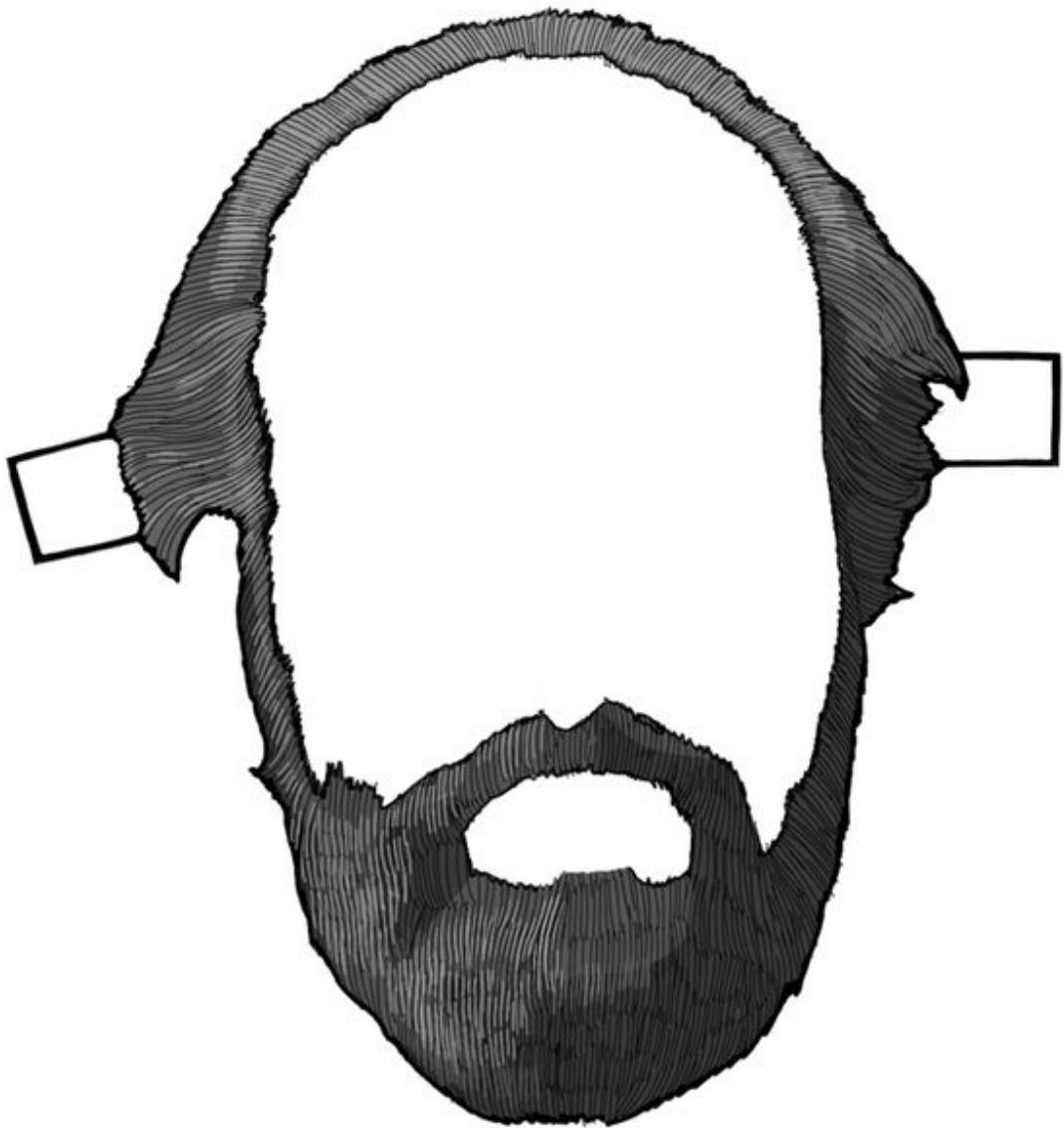


ILLUSTRATION: JONATHAN ALLARDYCE

## **Own It**

Grow a beard to distract from thinning, said Mr. McMillen. Then, get an easy cut and don't try to hide anything. Own your loss and retain a sense of self, he said.