



Functional Medicine in the Role of Cicatricial Alopecia Treatment

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Patients with cicatricial alopecia often turn to functional medicine when conventional therapies fail to provide them with satisfactory results. Conventional therapies typically range from oral to topical anti-inflammatory medications, and oftentimes these medications are associated with significant side effects. Because cicatricial alopecia leads to the replacement of hair follicles with permanent scar tissue, aggressive treatment is often pursued in the beginning stages to prevent further hair loss. Cicatricial alopecia can have a huge impact on self-esteem and confidence levels, and patients understandably leave no stone unturned in the pursuit of hair growth. Many people turn to a functional medicine specialist when they want a natural treatment approach. By definition, functional medicine aims to restore health by addressing the root cause of disease. Functional medicine does offer treatment options for alopecia but given the nature of this field, the treatment options are not always backed by research or regulated by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

Functional medicine specialists are known to take a multimodal approach to hair loss that includes vitamin and mineral supplementation, botanical product use, and mind and body practices. It is important to recognize that some botanical products on the market may actually aggravate scalp inflammation and cause irritation through a contact dermatitis. Natural products are not always harmless. Since cicatricial alopecia is an inflammatory condition in which the body destroys its own hair follicles, it is unlikely that vitamin supplementation or acupuncture alone will be curative. Fortunately, many of the mind and body practices that functional medicine specialists promote are safe and can provide benefits outside of hair growth. Acupuncture, aromatherapy, massage, and psychotherapy are all commonly used in functional medicine. They can each play a role in lowering stress levels, and the hope is that this can lower the amount of inflammation in the body. It is always a good idea to limit the amount of stress in our lives and address any vitamin deficiencies; however, unfortunately, the cause of cicatricial alopecia is often not this simple. Functional medicine may be more beneficial for those who suffer from hair loss secondary to malnutrition or severe stress in their lives.

If you are unsatisfied with your conventional medical treatment options and willing to pay out-of-pocket costs, a functional medicine consultation may be worthwhile. Addressing vitamin deficiencies and lowering stress levels are beneficial to your overall health even if they do not end up curing your hair loss. Health conditions like cicatricial alopecia are multifaceted, and there is nothing wrong with wanting to take a holistic approach. It is important, however, to have realistic expectations regarding the expected outcome. Functional medicine is not routinely recommended for those with cicatricial alopecia due to a lack of proven results. As

with any providers, it is also important to research the credentials of a provider before scheduling a consultation. If you want to be treated by a physician, make sure they have a M.D. or D.O. behind their names. Sometimes people with little-to-no medical training claim to be functional medicine specialists, and it is important to know that you are receiving medical advice from someone with an experienced background.



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