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Gravity position to prevent facial edema in hair transplantation

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One of the most disfiguring but temporary complications after hair transplantation is facial swelling. Many useful preventive methods against swelling have been tested. One unanimously agreed upon prevention to facial swelling is steroid use. There are also other practical physical methods—sleeping or resting with the head elevated at a 45-degree angle using pillows; wearing a firm headband; applying adhesive tape below the hairline; and applying ice packs to the forehead—that are recommended to reduce edema. However, despite the best efforts, edema can still be a problem. For example, this author met some patients who had severe upper eyelid swelling even though they used steroids and spent much time with their heads elevated. Interestingly, some were dentists. Because dentists spend much of their day with their heads inclined downwards, it seems that the lymphatic fluid accumulates in the frontal scalp, forehead, and upper eyelids due to gravity. Therefore, this author studied new positions using gravity as a preventive method against facial swelling after hair transplantation.

Objective

The purpose of this study was to evaluate whether keeping a supine, lateral decubitus posture and/or leaning the head backwards (to the point where the face is parallel to the floor, looking straight up at the ceiling) for 1.5 days whenever possible after surgery is effective in the prevention of facial edema.

Material and Methods

One thousand two hundred (1,200) patients with male or female pattern hair loss undergoing hair transplantation participated in this study from January 2004 to October 2008. All patients took steroid supplements for 4 days (betamethasone im—1 mg/10kg body weight for 2 days, then oral prednisolone [20mg/day] for 2 days), Tylenol® as a pain killer for 4 days, and prophylactic antibiotics for 7 days.

Patients were instructed to keep a supine or lateral decubitus position or to lean the head backwards (to the point where the face is parallel to the floor, looking straight up at the ceiling) as much as possible for 1.5 days after surgery (Figure 1). Normal activities such as eating, going to the bathroom, and visiting the clinic for shampoo treatment were permitted.

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Figure 1. Gravity position: keeping supine or lateral decubitus position, not in prone position.

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