

IN THIS ISSUE

Case Study of Hair Regrowth with Topical Cannabidiol (CBD)

Preview Long Hair Follicular Unit Excision

Fenugreek and Management of Androgenetic Alopecia: Fact or Fiction

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FUE Heresy: The True Impact of FUE Follicle Transections on Follicle Survival and Hair Diameter Index Values

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Transected follicles have shown some ability to regenerate growing hair at a given rate depending on the location of the transection. To date, there has been no examination of the true impact of follicle transection rates given this follicle regeneration. This study attempts to quantify the impact of transections on the actual number of surviving follicles and determine the impact on the cosmetic outcome using the Hair Diameter Index (HDI).¹

Method: Follicle transection samples from 29 male patients undergoing FUE were evaluated for the level of transection and the location noted.

Results: There were 1,682 transected follicles examined. Approximately 45% of transections were in the middle third and the remainder were split evenly in the upper and lower thirds.

Conclusion: Based on the studies showing follicle regeneration, it is estimated that 953, or 57%, of the 1,682 transected follicles would be expected to survive. With the survival of transected follicles, the visual impact of transections may be minimal. Using the equation for the HDI calculation, the result suggests that a transection rate of 32% would only start to make a significant visual difference in the transplant density. It is apparent that transections should be minimized, but great efforts should be made to prevent factors such as desiccation and handling trauma, which can harm a significant number of follicles, as these factors may have a greater role in the cosmetic outcome of an FUE procedure.

Key Words: follicle regrowth, FUE, Hair Diameter Index (HDI), hair density, transection

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INTRODUCTION

It has been well demonstrated that transected follicles have the ability to regenerate growing hair,²⁻⁴ however, the extent to which this is possible depends on the location of the follicle transection. Kim's work indicates that the survival rates for follicle portions, where the follicle was transected at various levels, are as follows:

Upper third (lower two-thirds intact planted) – 83%

Lower third (upper two-thirds intact planted) – 65%

Middle third (upper half planted) – 40%

Middle third (lower half planted) – 27%

Current FUE devices have made FUE fast and efficient with transection rates in the 2-5% range possible. In my own experience, I have found that as the speed of FUE increases and the punch cutting diameter decreases, the rate of follicle transection increases.

There seems to be an "inviolable" rule that any follicle transection results in irreparable harm and all transections should be avoided. Based on the works cited above, that maxim may not be entirely grounded in fact. To date, there has been no examination about the true impact of a marginal increase in follicle transection rates given the follicle regeneration rates in the studies noted above.

Some of the conclusions from this study are sure to be controversial as they contradict long-held principles.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

125	FUE Heresy: The True Impact of FUE Follicle Transections on Follicle Survival and Hair Diameter Index Values
127	President's Message
128	Co-Editors' Messages
130	Executive Director's Message
135	Notes from the Editor Emeritus: Dr. Dow Stough
140	Case Study of Hair Regrowth with Topical Cannabidiol (CBD)
144	Preview Long Hair Follicular Unit Excision
148	Fenugreek and Management of Androgenetic Alopecia: Fact or Fiction
151	Literature Review
152	In Memory of Dr. Muhammad Ahmad
154	Letter to the Editors
155	Hear from the Assistants: Lorryama Duraes
157	Message from the ISHRS 2021 World Congress Program Chair
159	ABHRS President's Corner
160	Classified Ads
161	Calendar of Events

HAIR TRANSPLANT FORUM INTERNATIONAL

is published bi-monthly by the
International Society of Hair Restoration Surgery

First-class postage paid Milwaukee, WI and
additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER Send address changes to:

Hair Transplant Forum International
International Society of Hair Restoration Surgery
1932 S. Halsted St., Suite 413
Chicago, IL 60608 USA
Telephone 1-630-262-5399
U.S. Domestic Toll Free 1-800-444-2737
Fax 1-630-262-1520

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1932 S. Halsted St., Suite 413
Chicago, IL 60608 USA

Printed in the USA.



Official Publication of the
International Society of Hair Restoration Surgery