

# *Standardized Scalp Massages*

## *Literature Excerpt*



# Standardized Scalp Massages - Literature Excerpt

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- *Note: the following excerpt details directions for the standardized scalp massages (SSMs) to which all survey contactees were exposed. The SSMs described herein were modeled after scalp massage therapy-responding individuals from May 2014-September 2015. Directions for measuring progress with photographic assessments are also included.*



# Standardized Scalp Massages

## A Step-By-Step Massaging Guide

When it comes to mechanical stimulation, these three approaches may encourage hair growth:

1. Massaging
2. Skin stretching
3. Acute Inflammation Generation

To maximize our use of each element, we can try the following:

1. Divide our scalps into three segments. For each twenty minute massage session, we focus on just *one* scalp segment.
2. For each twenty-minute massage session, we allocate a specified amount of time to *just* massaging, *just* skin stretching, and *just* acute inflammation generation.

The scalp segments - and the pinching, pressing, and stretching techniques - are covered in the video. For now, here some general rules and principles for the massages:

## General Rules For Each Massage Session:

1. **FIRM FINGERS.** Whenever you're pinching, pressing, or stretching - plant your fingers firmly against your scalp skin. This means that when your fingers move, so does



your scalp skin. In other words, don't drag or rake your fingers against the scalp and create friction. The idea is to manipulate the skin, not scratch your head.

2. **SHORT FINGERNAILS.** Keep your fingernails relatively short. I like to do my pinches and stretches with the pad of my thumb and the pads or nails of my pointer and middle fingers (see the video). Using your nails is fine... But if your nails are too long, they can often snag and rip out hair during your massages.
3. **SHEDDING.** It's typical to see some shedding during the massages. Even without pattern hair loss, we tend to lose 100+ hairs daily. It's part of the natural hair cycle. When we massage, many hairs that would've fallen out during the day tend to get knocked out during the massages. This can be alarming, unless we recognize that these hairs would've fallen out unnoticed throughout the course of the day anyway. It's not abnormal for someone to report 10-20 shed hairs per massage session, but the amount of hair fall per session depends on your overall hair density. Some will have more, some will have less. With that said, **massage-induced shedding should never lead to visibly thinner hair.** If the massages are making your hair look visibly thinner, that's an indication that you're going too hard, creating too much friction, and / or need to re-evaluate your technique.
4. **MICRO-WOUNDING / HEALING.** We can't stress this enough. A major component of these massages is inflammation generation and *healing*. People forget about the healing part. The reason we divide the scalp into three sections is because 1) it allows for a more focused, dedicated approach, and 2) it gives us greater recovery time for each scalp section. To elaborate, we have three scalp sections. We focus on one scalp section per massage session. We're doing two massage sessions per day. That means if we're correctly spacing out our massages (12 hours apart), then for any scalp section, we have 36 hours to recover before we massage that section again. That's plenty of time for recovery, and it prevents one of the most common mistakes made: too much inflammation generation and too short of a healing window. Try to stick to this system so that you give your scalp the time it needs to recover.

Now, let's cover the basics of each massage session:



## **A Typical Massage Session**

1. **3 MINUTES - WARMUP.** Begin the session with a general warmup massage of the *entire* scalp - back, front, top, sides, and even forehead. Firmly plant your fingers and palms and slide the scalp skin across the bones. Press and pinch your skin all over. Give your hair a gentle tug. Do whatever feels comfortable to get the blood flowing to your scalp. After three minutes, it's time to transition into our focus area for the session... Either our hairline, our vertex, or our scalp sides. See the video for more clarity.
2. **6 MINUTES - PINCHING.** Use your thumb pad and your pointer and middle finger pads *or* nails to pinch the scalp skin, sometimes lifting the skin in areas that are more pliable (your sides and nape of the neck). The idea here is still to create inflammation, but more at the *skin-level* and less so in the deeper tissues of the scalp. There are two types of pinches - a single-handed pinch and a double-handed pinch. Depending on your scalp elasticity, you'll want to adjust your pinching techniques to maximize efficacy. See the video for details on pinching types and techniques for each scalp section.
3. **6 MINUTES - PRESSING.** Use your finger pads, palms, and/or knuckles to press hard against the scalp and generate a lot of downward pressure. The objective here is to create acute inflammation in the deeper tissues of your scalp skin. Strong, firm pressing. See the video for details on pressing techniques for each scalp section.
4. **5 MINUTES - STRETCHING.** Use your thumb pad *or* nails and your pointer and middle finger pads *or* nails to stretch the scalp skin. Firmly plant your hands, press down, and stretch the scalp skin, holding the stretch for 1-2 seconds each. Just like pinching, there are two types of stretches - a single-handed stretch and a double-handed stretch. See the video for details on stretching types and techniques for each scalp section.
5. **REPEAT TWICE DAILY** (once in the morning, once at night), totaling 40-minutes of massaging per day (two 20-minute sessions). Try to space out your sessions 12 hours apart, but don't worry if it's not perfect.



During and after a session, what should you look for to gauge if you're being effective?

### **What To Look For During / After Each Massage:**

1. **Increased scalp elasticity.** The pinching, pressing, and stretching are all meant to simultaneously increase the elasticity of your scalp. If you have pattern hair loss, you might notice that the sides of your scalp are more pliable and much easier to pinch than your vertex, upper temples, and thinning regions. If you feel the scalp of someone with no hair loss, you'll notice that they generally have equal elasticity all across the scalp - on the sides, top, back, and vertex. We want to achieve the same! In the first few months, many people doing the massages notice increased elasticity in their thinning regions. You should look forward to these changes.
2. **Slightly erythema (pink or reddened skin).** This is an indication of acute inflammation generation and increased blood flow to the scalp - both of which we want to induce in order to initiate the wound-healing response, and thereby growth factors and signaling proteins associated with a new anagen (i.e., growth) stage of the hair cycle. Slight erythema is what most people see after massaging. If you don't see it, you may not be going hard enough.
3. **Increased sebum release.** During and after the massages, many people report that their hair feels and looks oilier. This is sebum release. Because of the nature of these exercises, increased sebum release during the massages is normal and often expected. For most people, it tends to be more pronounced in the early months and more muted toward months six and beyond.
4. **Increased dandruff release.** During / after the massages, many people report seeing more skin flakes. This is dandruff, and it's a part of the normal massage process (it's generally just a consequence of inflammation). If you have a history of excessive dandruff or seborrheic dermatitis, ease into the massages and ensure that the efforts do not reactivate these conditions. Otherwise, a little dandruff is generally not a problem.
5. **Cradle cap.** Some readers pinched their scalps quite intensely, and their skin formed light brown scales / scabs resembling that of cradle cap (if you don't know what it is,



[Google Image](#) it). In our experience, this isn't problematic, but since 10-20% of people report it, it's common enough to make it worth mentioning.

**Watch The Technique Video To Confirm You're Massaging Correctly**

Please be sure to watch the accompanying video. The pinching, pressing, and stretching techniques are covered there, in detail, and for each scalp segment. And if you're interested in a summary of all segments and techniques covered, here's the table from the video:

<u>HAIRLINE</u> <u>~20 min</u>	<u>VERTEX</u> <u>~20 min</u>	<u>SIDES</u> <u>~25 min</u>
<b>Warmup (3 min)</b>	<b>Warmup (3 min)</b>	<b>Warmup (3 min)</b>
<b>Pinches (6 min)</b> -double-handed -single-handed	<b>Pinches (6 min)</b> -double-handed -single-handed	<b>Pinches (6 min)</b> -single-handed
<b>Presses (6 min)</b> -knuckles	<b>Presses (6 min)</b> -knuckles -fingers	<b>Presses (6 min)</b> -palms -knuckles
<b>Stretches (5 min)</b> -double-handed	<b>Stretches (5 min)</b> -double-handed	<b>Stretches (5 min)</b> -single-handed -double-handed
		<b>Scalp Ridge (5 min)</b> -pinches

**Rotate Your Massage Session Focus Segments**

It bears repeating: rotate your scalp segment focus areas! There are three scalp segments: the hairline, vertex, and sides. We're spacing out our massages each morning and night. Here's a schedule of what that looks like:



	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3
Morning	Hairline Focus	Sides Focus	Vertex Focus
Evening	Vertex Focus	Hairline Focus	Sides Focus

If each of our massages are roughly 12 hours apart, then once you work a focus area, you'll have 36 hours to recover before you work that focus area again. This allows for plenty of healing.

### **Remember: The Massages Are Adaptive!**

As you massage, your scalp elasticity will slowly increase over the course of many months. Don't rush to make your scalp more elastic and faster. As you progress and your elasticity increases, you'll be able to go harder on the scalp and recover more quickly. But when you're first starting out, don't over-exert yourself. Ease into the massages over a few months. Allow for ample recovery time. And after a few months, when you start noticing significantly more elasticity, you can consider going harder. If your scalp recovers as quickly as before, you've found your new intensity.

### **A Note On Intensity**

If you feel like you're knocking out too many hairs during each session, then it's probably the case that you're doing your *presses* too hard or too aggressively. Under these circumstances, we recommend the following:

- 1) Decrease your overall massage intensity. Find a level of intensity such that you only shed 10-15 hairs per session. As long as the hairs have a rounded "bulb" at the end, they are considered "telogen" hairs (which means they had technically disconnected from their hair follicle base 2-6 weeks prior, and are simply sitting without a blood supply in the hair shaft, waiting to fall out).



2) Skip the presses all together, and instead just divide your time between pinching and stretching. You can generate a good amount of redness and acute inflammation with the pinches alone, so don't worry about missing out on part of the therapy.

## **Massaging - Questions & Answers**

Here are some of the most commonly asked massage questions.

### **What does the regrowth look like?**

People report two different signs of hair regrowth. The first - and most commonly reported - is an increase in thin, white hairs that begin sprouting in thinning areas. These hairs are called vellus hairs. In cases whereby any hair loss therapy is working, these hairs tend to grow longer, shed, regrow with a bit more pigment, and eventually match the look and feel of non-thinning hairs.

Others report no emergence of vellus hairs at all. Instead, they report the emergence of thin, pigment-matching hairs that eventually thicken and resemble the look of non-thinning hairs. Here's a photo example submitted by one reader. You can see the emergence of small black hairs at the bottom of the "+3 months" photo.

**+1 month**



**+3 months**



Finally, some readers report that - in both cases of regrowth signs - hair sheds sometimes took place, meaning that sometimes their new hairs fell out and then regrew thicker and thicker over a series of hair cycles before finally turning terminal. This wasn't the case with everyone, but it also wasn't uncommon. If you're noticing that some of your new hairs are shedding - don't be alarmed. It's sometimes a part of the process.



## **When can I expect to see regrowth?**

Everyone varies, but the timeline for self-perceived improvements seems to be 8-12 months. If you do not see improvements within that timeframe, it's time to start seeking other therapies. Do not fall into the trap of thinking that your technique might be wrong – as we've seen success across a wide array of techniques (provided they all leverage acute inflammation and perimeter muscle relaxation).

## **I'm four months in and am seeing a few new hairs. Is this a good sign?**

Usually, yes. But keep in mind that hair growth is a long game. Given that it takes infants over half a decade to grow a head of hair, and that it takes adults decades to lose it, the fact that we can see any improvements in under a year is remarkable.

Some people see visible results quickly and within a few months. But most people need at least 8-12 months to perceive positive cosmetic changes.

## **I'm getting a ton of sebum / dandruff release. Do I leave it on my scalp?**

You can use isopropyl alcohol wipes to wipe away any excess sebum or dandruff during and after the massages. This will help your hair look less greasy after a session, and maybe even limit the reabsorption of newly released sebum.

## **I'm a few months in and my hair feels dry and brittle. Why?**

Persistent acute inflammation, in some individuals, seems to decrease sebum production. In general, this isn't a big deal, but in some cases, too little sebum can lead to hair that feels more dry and brittle since there's less lubrication.

If you think your hair feels too dry or if your hair begins to break and fall often, then ease off the massages for a 0-7 days until your hair feels better. If you need it, take even more time off.

Even with just a few days' break (or lighter massage sessions), people tend to report that sebum secretion returns to normal.



## **Instead of two sessions daily, can I just do one long 40-minute session per day?**

Possibly! We've seen people report success across a variety of sessions ranging from 1x daily for 10-40 minutes daily to 3x weekly for 60 minutes. So long as you're hitting the suspecting mechanisms, there's a possibility you'll see benefit. Having said that, consider the following.

We split our scalp into segments, and the time between sessions (and scalp segments) allows each segment to recover from the acute inflammation we induce. Changing your routine to one big 40-minutes per day session is probably fine, but be mindful of your scalp's recovery window. It's not the generation of inflammation; it's the body's reaction (and recovery) that we're trying to leverage!

## **My hands are hurting. What should I do?**

Take a break! Your hands will get stronger as you continue. Start the massages back up again whenever your hands feel better.

## **I'm a few months in, and now when I massage, my fingertips go numb. Is that bad?**

This usually indicates you're going far too hard. Take 3-7 days off so you can heal. There's no need to hurt your hands or exude unsustainable efforts during this process. Take it slow and try to find some enjoyment out of it.

## **Small blemishes are showing up after I massage. Is that bad?**

This is normal, and it's usually due to the initial sebum release from the massages – particularly in the early months of the effort. Give those areas a break, and massage around them.

## **If I massage more, do I speed up my regrowth?**

Probably not. The massages are part-inflammation generation, part-healing. If you massage too frequently, too hard, and too long, you shorten your healing window. If you continue this



for months without ever letting your scalp finish healing, you risk chronically “acutely” inflaming your scalp. This is the opposite of what we’re looking to achieve.

### **I have regrowth. Do I have to keep massaging for the rest of my life?**

We don’t know! Many readers have reported sustained hair regrowth – even 3+ years after starting the massages. Others have reported sustained hair regrowth even after tapering to just a few massage sessions per week. Having said that, there are a handful of people who initially reported hair regrowth, but who later saw those gains slowly diminish over the following years.

This is why it’s so important to track progress objectively. That way, you’ll know if any hair gains are holding, or whether you need to layer in more treatments.

### **If I start the massages and simultaneously stop using Rogaine, will I shed?**

First, the massages are not meant to replace any other hair loss intervention you’re already pursuing. So, don’t stop these treatments because you want to try the massages. That goes for finasteride, dutasteride, and any other therapy someone is trying.

Instead, we recommend adding in massaging as an adjunct therapy to your current routine. If it works, great! If it doesn’t, you still have those other therapies working for you.

### **Can I combine the massages and the dermaroller?**

Yes, but we don’t yet know if doing both of these things (i.e., microneedling and massaging) is better than doing one versus the other.

If you do take this approach, be sure to take a several-day break from massaging after any dermarolling session. Again, we want to be careful with the amount of acute inflammation we generate. A little bit works for us – especially when we’re leveraging the downtime (i.e., healing process). Too much will interfere with that healing process, and it might slow down our results.



## **Final Massage Advice**

### **Stick to the Plan!**

We often get asked how anyone has the time to do this, given the minutes of commitment each day.

*Question: How will I ever find 40 minutes out of each day to do these exercises? This therapy is impossible to execute.*

If you're feeling this way, this experimental intervention is not right for you! That is totally fine. Remember: there are a lot of interventions for hair loss, and massages are not just experimental in nature, but also under-researched versus most other choices out there.

So, find a plan that fits your needs and preferences. If you decide to try these massages, try them of analytical curiosity or from the perspective of an experiment!

### **When And Where To Do Your Sessions**

Here are some ways people have reported how they got their sessions in:

- Right after waking up and before falling asleep (becomes built into your daily routine)
- While watching TV (this is really the easiest... people watch a lot of TV)

[...]



# Measuring Progress

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## **Whichever Regimen You Choose, You Have To Track Progress**

Certain treatments tend to work better for certain people. You'll never know if something is working for you unless you track your progress.

The reality is that you can't feel your hair growing in real-time. And aside from the scalp itch that coincides with pattern hair loss, you can rarely feel it falling out.

The best way to honestly assess your treatment's efficacy is to take photos.

## **Photos Help Track Progress, But Don't Stress About Perfection**

The perfect photo comparisons must be high quality images and consist of the same angle, distance, lighting, focus, exposure, hair length, hair combing style, and hair wetness. They're taken on a consistent basis (once per month), which means once per month hair cuts, consistent access to a good camera, a room with controlled lighting, and markers for scalp placement.

That's a lot to ask of someone. If you can do it, great! Otherwise, here are a few tips to track your progress manageably.

Once per month, go into your bathroom, turn on the lights, comb your hair to showcase where you're thinning, and snap a few photos with your phone. Do this when your hair is dry. Store the photos, mark the date, and you're done.

This takes out the stress of picture-perfect comparisons, and at least give you a ballpark idea of which direction your results are headed. That's really all we want.



After four or so months, look at your photos and ask yourself one question: am I improving, staying the same, or regressing?

That's all you need to ask to see if a regimen is helping you or not.