

The Things We Think About Earlier Than We Used To

What young men's reactions to hair loss reveal about changing timelines of awareness.

It started with an offhand comment.

"I'm already looking into hair-loss prevention."

The speaker wasn't middle-aged. He wasn't actively balding.

He was 22.

The comment caught us off guard. Not because hair-loss is unusual, but because the timing was.

It made us wonder whether some concerns are entering awareness earlier than they once did – and what that might mean for the way people think about the future.

To explore the idea, we surveyed men aged 18-30 about hair loss, aging, and how they think about future change. It revealed something interesting about the relationship between awareness, emotion, and action.



ABOUT THE STUDY

Online survey of 500 men
ages 18-30 in the US.
Fielded January 2026



22 years old



Not actively
losing his hair



Already thinking
about prevention

For many young men, hair loss is already on the radar.

While it may not yet dominate everyday life for young men, hair loss has already entered the conversation.

“

“It’s scary! I don’t know what to expect.”

— 25 years old

21

Average age first thought about hair loss

70%

Have already thought about the possibility of losing their hair

What first put hair loss on your radar?

% selecting each option



Hair loss is about **more** **than hair.**

The strongest reactions weren't about losing hair.
They were about what losing hair might mean.

73%

Hair is part of
how I express
my identity.

66%

Losing my hair
would affect how
I see myself.

69%

Hair changes
make me more
aware of aging.

**Many things can make people feel “older”.
Hair loss is unique in its ability to make
young men question how they see
themselves.**

The language tells a bigger story.

"I'm actually very scared."

"My hair is everything to me."

"I won't be able to find real love."

"I just don't want to go bald."

"People definitely judge and will stay stuff about you."

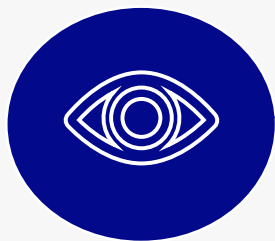
"What if I go out and people look at me weird?"

"I worry I will start to lose a lot of hair soon."

"It will make me lose confidence."

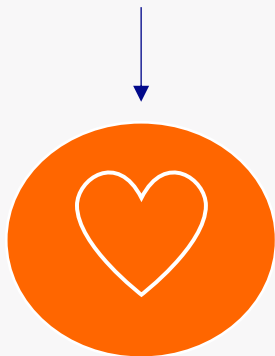
"I don't want to lose that part of my identity."

Awareness, emotion & action don't always arrive at the same time.



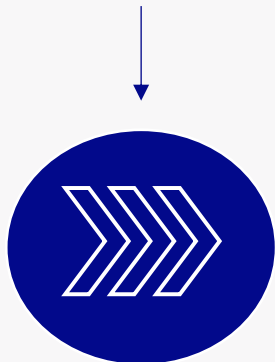
Awareness

Average first
thought at age 21



Emotion

Scared
Anxious
Terrifying
Depressing



Action

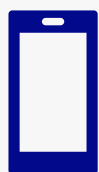
Most are not yet
taking tangible action
steps yet

Awareness
doesn't
always
lead to
immediate
action.

But strong
emotions
often lead
to **future**
action.

Awareness is arriving earlier.

Today, people encounter:



**Information
earlier.**



**Options
earlier.**



**Treatments
earlier.**



**Communities
earlier.**

As a result, many begin forming beliefs and expectations long before a category becomes relevant to their daily lives.

Exposure



People are exposed to content, stories and conversations.

Awareness



The topic enters awareness earlier than before.

Consideration



They explore possibilities and form early opinions.

Relevance



By the time the need is immediate, beliefs are already in place.

By the time people need you, some decisions may already be made.

The hair-loss study started with a simple observation.
A young man thinking about a future possibility much earlier than we expected.
The bigger question isn't whether that is happening with hair loss.
It's where else it might be happening.

What concerns or categories are entering awareness earlier than they used to?

What assumptions are people forming before they ever become customers?

What fears, hopes or misconceptions exist before need emerges?

How might those beliefs shape future decisions?

Categories don't begin when consumers enter them.

By the time someone becomes a customer, user, patient, caregiver, or resident, part of the story may have already happened.

Hair loss is just one example.

The point of this study isn't really hair loss. It's that awareness, expectations, and emotional reactions may be forming earlier than we realize.

We've seen similar dynamics across:

Women's Health

People researching menopause years before symptoms become disruptive.

Caregiving

Adult children forming assumptions about senior care long before a parent needs help.

Wellness

Consumers developing beliefs about prevention before experiencing a health issue.

Aging

Younger adults thinking about future changes long before they identify as "older".

Life Transitions

Major decisions often begin before people recognize they're in a decision-making process.

Understanding what happens before the need emerges is often where the most interesting opportunities lie.

At Morning Light Strategy, we help organizations uncover the tensions, expectations, and decision-making patterns that shape behavior across periods of change and transition.

Where do you have earlier opportunities to shape thinking?

By the time someone becomes a customer, user, patient, caregiver or resident, they may have already spent months or years forming beliefs, expectations, and emotional reactions.

Understanding those upstream moments is where some of the most valuable opportunities emerge.

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