



How to
optimize those

Glossy Locks

By Anna D. Guanche, MD

Hair is so fascinating. We as a nation spend billions on our hair, styling, coloring, highlighting, blow-drying, trimming and gelling it. It is something we use to express ourselves because it is a part of our body that is freely changeable. Who knew that stacks of dead protein secreted from specialized bulbs in the skin could be so important? It is not only part of our own identity, it is the way we identify others. What are the first three traits that come to mind when describing someone? Height, gender and hair: The tall brunette. The petite blonde. The balding gentleman...and so on. When hair is on our heads, it signifies style and beauty - it has sex appeal. The moment it is no longer attached to our heads, it is the most revolting thing imaginable! "Excuse me. There is a hair in my soup!" (It may have been your own.)

Glossy thick hair is a sign of health and vibrancy. Thin, brittle, opaque hair is a sign of illness or senescence. As we know, older people generally have less hair, but also their hair texture is dry and frizzy. What are some things we can do to stack the odds in favor of glorious, vibrant, shiny hair?

Some interesting facts about hair are:

The potential length is inherited (like dog breeds). If left untrimmed, hair grows to a genetically determined length.

Some hairs are growing, some are slow growing and some are in a "resting phase."

Hairs on different parts of your body grow at different rates. Imagine if your eyebrow hairs grew at the same rate as your scalp hair. What a sight!

Male-pattern baldness is accompanied by a decrease in scalp hair but an increase in body hair.

Vitamins

My favorite vitamins to support hair health are biotin, folic acid and glucosamine. I think a multivitamin with iron is great as well. Some people are sensitive to the iron (get constipated). In that case, once-weekly iron would be better than nothing. Viviscal is a supplement that has biotin and AminoMar, a shellfish extract that is possibly helpful in hair growth. Of course, you should run any new oral regimen by your doctor before starting.

Diet

Because hair is actually composed of keratin protein, it is best to provide plenty of protein in the diet for hair to grow. If the body perceives a lack, it will shunt resources elsewhere because let's face it: Hair is optional; your liver function is not. Avoid crash diets and eat plenty of protein.

Stress/Hormonal changes

Changes in hormone balance can increase facial and body hair while decreasing scalp hair. Prolonged stress also causes the body to release cortisol, a stress hormone that can mimic androgens such as testosterone. So relax! Breathe, do yoga, take 15 minutes a day for yourself and reflect on positive things.

Hair care and products

You control the amount of sun damage, chlorine damage and processing damage. Take it easy on your hair. If you swim regularly, coat your hair with Reflect H2O before getting in the pool. If you are in the sun a lot, there are hair sunscreen sprays such as Shiseido Refreshing Sun Protection that you can use. It takes one second to pull out one strand, and a year or two to grow it back fully. Scalp hair grows at a rate of about 1cm per month. When dyeing the hair, lightening it is much more damaging (opens cuticles to pull out pigment) than darkening. Troy Jensen, celebrity photographer of Jennifer Lopez, recommends Oribe Shine Light Reflecting Spray for anyone lusting after an instant shine. Daily hair care products can also help to condition and smooth the hair. I find that John Frieda Brilliant color-specific shampoo and conditioner work best for me.

Lab work

A few tests can be ordered if a thinning problem is not going away after a few months. A look at the thyroid can tell us whether you are hyper- or hypothyroid, both of which can lead to hair loss. Blood counts can reveal anemia, which also puts the body in power save mode. A general screen for autoimmune problems is also helpful. This list is by no means comprehensive.

Topical medications

Minoxidil, aka Rogaine, is the most popular over-the-counter topical that prevents progression of hair loss and encourages modest hair growth. Word of mouth from our patients tells us that eyelash growth factors such as Latisse can stimulate scalp-hair growth as well. Topical progesterone may encourage hair growth by modifying the hormonal profile in the scalp skin. The three actives can be compounded together with an anti-inflammatory to cover all the bases.

Injectable medications

Certain injectable medications have been shown to stimulate hair growth. Low-dose anti-inflammatory injections and progesterone injections have shown promise in encouraging hair follicles.

Oral medications

Propecia is known to prevent progression of hair loss and to encourage a small amount of growth in men. There are occasional side effects because testosterone receptors are blocked. It needs to be continued indefinitely. Upon discontinuation of the drug, the hairline recedes to where it would have been if it had never been treated, however, it is arguably the most effective oral treatment for men.

Hair placement

In some cases, after everything has been tried, the need or desire for hair placement arises. Nowadays, there are advanced techniques for restoring a full appearance to the hair that incorporate the natural hair and allow for swimming, showering, sports, etc. High-profile clients of mine enjoy these services from Thursday's Salon in Calabasas. They report improved appearance and increased confidence. Hair 2 Wear is a line of hair extensions "for longer, fuller, more beautiful hair" that supermodel Christie Brinkley developed. She feels that hair extensions contribute a great deal to her ever-youthful appearance.

Hair is an important and special part of our persona. Shiny, thick hair is a desirable trait in both men and women. Now, as I attempt to finish this article on a flight home from Boston, I realize that none other than Patrick Dempsey (McDreamy!) is sitting in the row behind me. Who better to inspire an article about glossy locks than the recipient of InStyle's Best Hair and People magazine's Sexiest Man Alive awards? With that said, hopefully some of the tips included in this piece are useful in achieving your own head full of healthy, glossy locks. ■

This is a general review—by no means comprehensive and does not substitute for individual medical advice.

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