Hair Problems? A Dermatologist May Get to the Root of the Matter

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Many people think dermatologists only specialize in skin care. Not so. These docs are also trained to care for the hair and nails. Because of this, they can often diagnose and treat women's hair loss, according to physicians speaking at a recent annual meeting of the American Academy of Dermatology, reports *ScienceDaily*.

"In the past, many women experiencing hair loss would suffer in silence, not knowing where to turn for help and trying their best to hide the problem," said Mary Gail Mercurio, MD, a dermatologist and associate professor of dermatology at the University of Rochester in New York. "But now, I see more and more women in my practice seeking treatment for hair loss and actively addressing this condition. That's encouraging, as the sooner hair loss is diagnosed, the better our chances of successfully treating it."

Common forms of female hair loss include female-pattern hair loss, hair loss caused by excessive production of male hormones (hyperandrogenism) and hair loss caused by scarring of the scalp (cicatricial alopecia).

All of these hair loss conditions are treatable with varying degrees of success, Mercurio said.

When women suffer hair loss, however, it may also indicate more serious underlying health concerns.

"Dermatologists know that hair loss could be an important clue that something else is going on inside the body, such as a hormonal abnormality, lupus or thyroid disease," Mercurio said. "That's why I can't stress enough the importance of getting an accurate, and early, diagnosis for hair loss."

For women in particular, hair loss may trigger self-esteem issues that often drastically affect their quality of life. But lots of ongoing research is geared to finding effective treatments for these conditions.

"Some of the new laser and light-based therapies used for hair loss show promise in preliminary studies," Mercurio said. "We hope that these technologies will allow dermatologists to further expand treatment options for all forms of hair loss in the future."

Click here to read more about the hair-health connection.

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