Black Hair Growth

Yes, black hair can grow—long and strong!

December 3, 2008 By Gerrie E. Summers

Hair grows at about a half inch per month or six inches per year–for everyone. Nevertheless, the perception that black hair cannot grow and does not grow as quickly and as long as the hair of people from other ethnic groups is widespread. Here *Real Health* lays the myths to rest.

How the myth came to be. “The truth is that hair growth is largely determined by heredity,” says Roslyn Baker, owner of the Mahogany Door Salon in Richards, Texas. “It just so happens that most women of African descent have curly hair,” adds Baker, who developed and launched Soft & Beautiful Botanicals and is the company’s educational spokesperson. “Curly hair typically has restricted sebaceous (oil) glands that reduce the amount of oil that can be released to the scalp. Therefore the hair is often dry, which causes it to snap and break easily.” It’s not that the hair doesn’t grow, she continues, but that “very dry hair in its natural state can break just as often as it grows, so you don’t see the accumulation of length.”

Also, people with textured hair often experience other challenges that make their hair more difficult to achieve growth. “Damage to the scalp and hair growth problems are often due to the overuse and abuse of relaxers, heat styling tools, coloring, weaves, braiding and traction,” says Kathleen Johnson, brand educator for Dr. Miracle’s, a popular ethnic hair care product line. “High blood pressure, diabetes, poor diet, lack of exercise, smoking, drug side effects, hormones and stress are also factors that result in slow hair growth or loss of hair. African Americans experience many of these health and lifestyle issues, but these factors can cause hair growth problems for anyone.

“The key to healthy hair growth begins with a healthy lifestyle,” continues Johnson. She suggests that you eat a diet rich in protein, vitamins and especially omega-3 fatty acids (salmon, nuts) and that you exercise regularly for good circulation and stay hydrated by drinking an adequate amount of water. “Almost all health-related problems are a result of some deficiency in one of these areas,” she says, noting that our hair, skin and nails are dependable gauges of our overall health. Hair that breaks easily, is fragile, dull and lifeless, grows slowly or not at all or falls out may also indicate that your stress level is too high or that your general health is failing. If this is the case, says Johnson, consult a physician.

Hair Growth Aids: Real Help or Just Hype?

When it comes to hair growth, there is no magic pill. Currently, for many people (not all) losing hair due to genetics or alopecia—the medical term for loss of hair—the FDA-approved drug minoxidil (sold as Rogaine) has shown positive results in re-growing hair. But beyond minoxidil (for use by both sexes) and finasteride (sold as Propecia for use by men only), claims that a product can cause hair growth and prevent hair loss through nurturing the hair follicles are unproven. "Molecules must be very small to penetrate the scalp and go all the way to the follicle," says Baker. "Most of the hair growth products act as a topical solution and only affect the surface of the hair or scalp area and do not have proven regrowth ability." The FDA has been very strict with companies that make claims of hair growth, she says, so consumers should look for FDA-approved products. Baker also notes that most of these products warn that hair loss might return when use is discontinued. Hair vitamins, since they are ingested, might help increase blood flow or nourish the follicle, but a regular multivitamin could be equally as helpful to those desiring hair growth, says Baker, adding to not overlook rest, proper diet and exercise.

What About the Scalp?

The scalp often goes unnoticed until it becomes irritated and inflamed or registers hair loss. Most of us are familiar with dandruff. But other scalp conditions, such as eczema, dermatitis and psoriasis, can result in more serious forms of scaling and irritation. If severe, these conditions can contribute to hair loss and require treatment by a doctor. The most common scalp problems, however, are hair loss and breakage that result from using heat appliances, hair styles that involve excessive handling, and styling products that contain harsh chemicals, such as dyes and relaxers. "The scalp is most seriously affected by relaxers," says Baker. "Relaxers can leave a buildup of calcium on the hair and scalp." Baker says the most important element to a healthy scalp is keeping it clean and free of excess oils that clog pores and inhibit hair growth. But be careful. Too much washing can cause the scalp to produce too many oils. Also, the scalp needs stimulation, which you can get through doing aerobic exercise, inverting your head for a minute or two each day or getting regular scalp massages. "The idea is to stimulate blood flow to your hair follicles where growth begins," says Johnson.

BLACK HAIR CARE BASICS 101

Washing	Conditioning	Drying	Styling
Do not wash daily.	Deep condition after shampooing.	Towel-blot hair, do not rub.	Use moisturizing styling aids.
Wash at least once a week, no more than three times a week	Use plastic cap or use standard dryer for deeper penetration.	Avoid blow drying. Air dry or use standard dryer.	Comb hair when wet using wide-tooth comb.
Use all-natural products.	Thoroughly rinse out conditioner	Use heat appliances at low settings.	Avoid curling/using flat irons. Roll hair or wrap.

Choose a shampoo formulated for black hair and specific hair care needs (relaxed, color-treated, etc.).	Apply natural oil to scalp. Follow with hair lotion. Pay attention to ends.	Apply protective lotion before using heat.	Avoid stressful styles and over-processing.
Use pads of fingers, not fingernails, when shampooing.	Avoid greases that clog pores.		Get regular trims.

HEAD'S UP

Products to Try

- Dr. Miracle's Damaged Hair Medicated Treatment; drmiracles.com
- Nexxus Emergencée Strengthening Polymeric Reconstructor; nexxus.com
- Nioxin Intensive Therapy line: Follicle Booster, Weightless Reconstructive Masque, Hydrating Hair Masque, Deep Repair Masque, Recharging Complex; nioxin.com
- Design Essentials Stimulations Super Moisturizing Conditioner; designessentials.com
- Kinky-Curly Knot Today, Kinky-Curly Original Curling Custard; kinky-curly.com
- Nexxus Aloe Rid Gentle Clarifying Shampoo; nexxus.com
- Soft & Beautiful Daily Crème Moisturizer with Aloe, Ultimate Protection No-Lye Cream Relaxer (Regular) and Oil Sheen Conditioning Spray; softandbeautifulhair.com

HAIR JOURNEYS

By LaToya Johnson and Kat Noel

Angelicia Morton, 22

Relaxes hair

"When I went to college, I didn't know how to press, condition or moisturize my hair. Needless to say, my shoulder-length hair became a bob within a year. My hair was brittle, and my ends were split. In senior year, I cut my hair short. Afterward, I thought, why didn't I do this sooner? Now, my hair is growing and healthy. My hair treats me well when I treat it well!"

Shana Kirby, 23

Presses hair

"In elementary school, I used relaxers, but soon I noticed my hair had split ends and it didn't look healthy. I started wearing braids, but then the hair on both sides of my head became thin. Then I had my haircut and it started to grow out and became healthier. What I learned is that split ends must be cut. If not, your hair splits all the way up to the root and becomes harder to style."

Makieya Kamara, 21

Wears hair natural

“My Afro was pretty big, but I wasn’t getting the ends trimmed and my hair started to break off. This summer, I had my hair completely cut off. Now, I do a lot of research and pay attention to the ingredients in hair products before I use them. I use what works for my hair. I get a deep condition and trim every month and moisturize my hair every night before tying it with a silk scarf. For me, hair growth is important because I want to do something different and see how far my hair can go.”

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http://beta.docker.realhealthmag.com/article/africanamerican-hair-growth-15715-8317