Oh Snap!

Are you sick and tired of hair breakage?

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Now that lots of YouTube videos have proved that black tresses can grow waist-length and inches beyond, why hasn't your crowning glory become just like one of those success stories you've been watching online?

The answer may be breakage. Still, here's a scientific fact that says hope springs eternal: Hair grows. But because tresses can also suffer from damage, split ends, dryness, illness and the effects of certain meds, breakage is a perennial possibility. This is why we have to do everything in our power to make sure that our hair is in good condition and breakage is minimized, or even better, totally eliminated.

In her practice, Amy McMichael, MD, a dermatologist at Wake Forest University School of Medicine, says the major causes of hair breakage she's seen include "weathering, such as heat; lots of brushing and combing; and applying color."

Adds McMichael, "The other issue is that most women older than age 45 have some degree of hair fragility, and African-American women have the most fragility of all. Add a bit of heat and color to moderately fragile hair and this causes increased breakage."

According to McMichael, people of African descent have weaker hair shafts. This means when coiled, curly tresses are wet and tangled, you should only touch your hair with reverent fingers. Your hair must be handled with tender, loving care, or else you may see those precious strands stuck in your comb or brush, or strewn on your floor.

Black hair, especially in its natural state, is very delicate. Those of us with kinky coils or curls must detangle our hair gently. A little patience goes a long way to addressing breakage and preserving length. Another suggestion from hair care experts is to apply a detangler before combing your tresses to help soften the hair.

As McMichael mentions, over-manipulation of your mane is another problem that can lead to hair

breakage. Be warned: Too much handling of hair strands is a sure way to promote breakage and assure you'll never retain any of that precious, hard-won length. Examples of "handling the hair" include the following unwise moves: changing styles every day; marathon sessions monopolizing the mirror as you twist and pull your hair this way and that to achieve a certain style; and applying heat, chemicals or other texture-changers to your tresses without using protective treatments or giving your hair time to rest and recover between processes.

In addition, when it comes to breakage, many sisters are ambivalent about trimming their hair. Some people believe that trimming means they'll lose all the length they've achieved. Many women see the ends of their strands thin out and never make the connection that this is where the hair breaks off. But a trim is an essential part of avoiding breakage and maintaining length. "The hair should be trimmed every six to eight weeks for optimum health of the hair shaft," McMichael suggests.

Finally, one of the key weapons in the war against breakage is a healthy diet. The importance of eating enough protein cannot be overstressed. Since a strand of hair is composed primarily of protein, it's essential to eat the proper servings of lean meats, such as chicken or fish, each day, in addition to other nutrients needed to strengthen hair, such as iron and vitamin E. And get nutrients from nourishing foods rather than supplements.

Says McMichael, "A healthy diet is imperative for healthy hair."

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