Hair Health

Hair issues often go beyond the cosmetic. Our manes can unlock vital information about our health. This new Real Health section focuses on the link between our hair and our health from a uniquely holistic perspective.

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More and more doctors agree that the state of our hair is an indicator of our physical health. *Real Health*'s mission is to raise our readers' awareness about this connection. As we begin this hair journey together, our goal is to go beyond the role hair plays as an enhancement of our physical attractiveness. At *Real Health*, we also see hair as a measure of our total wellness and a reason to become even more proactive in ensuring we take better care of ourselves.

Nutrition and diet: "Vitamin supplements are important due to the highly processed food consumption patterns of the majority of people," says Antonio Armani, MD, a hair transplant specialist in Beverly Hills. "Most people are overfed but undernourished. Most food has been so processed that it retains few essential vitamins our bodies require on a daily basis. Examples of vitamins and minerals that are important for healthy hair are vitamin B-6, biotin, calcium, iron, zinc, copper and silica. MSM [Methylsulfonylmethane] is also important for hair as it helps produce keratin [a protein that's the major component of hair]."

Other nutritional deficiencies also create hair problems. For example, iron deficiency, due to heavy menstrual bleeding and inadequate consumption of red meat, could cause hair shedding. Fad and crash diets can negatively impact hair health. At the same time, excessive doses of some vitamins, such as A and E, can contribute to hair loss. In addition, malnutrition from various eating disorders, such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia, can cause dramatic hair damage.

Illness and disease: "Certain illnesses, such as hypothyroidism (underfunctioning of the thyroid gland) or hyperthyroidism (overproduction of the thyroid hormone), will lead to hair loss," Dr. Armani adds. "Other illnesses contributing to hair loss are diabetes, cancers, any type of chronic illness such as colitis or autoimmune diseases [such as lupus]."

Medications: "Medications that can affect the health of hair and contribute to hair loss include cancer treatments [chemotherapy drugs], some antidepressants, antihypertensive drugs, antiepileptic drugs, gout treatments, blood thinners and some cholesterol-lowering drugs," says Armani. "Sudden stopping and starting of the birth control pill can also cause hair loss." Adds Tim Horn, president and editor-in-chief of AIDSmeds.com, "Unexpected hair loss has also been seen in

some people taking HIV medications, including Epivir and the protease inhibitor Crixivan."

Hair styling: Dyeing, tinting, bleaching, straightening or perming hair can damage hair. Improper hair styling is also a culprit. Traction alopecia is hair loss caused by hair styles that pull too tightly on the scalp.

Stress: "Stress of any type [emotional or physical], high fever, anemia and postpregnancy hormone changes can also lead to hair loss," says Armani. "Most illnesses related to hair loss tend to be temporary once the illness is under control."

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