The Root of the Matter

Myths vs. facts about hair growth

June 4, 2018 By Gerrie E. Summers

Genetics and race have often been blamed for the supposed inability of African Americans to grow long hair. Of course, this theory is a myth. While genes do play a huge role in determining the shade, shape and texture of tresses, all human hair grows in, essentially, the same way. The length of an individual's mane is determined by the duration of that person's anagen phase. Additionally, although this period of the hair growth cycle is regulated by genetics, many people may be surprised to learn just how long tresses can grow.

Basically, a strand of hair consists of two parts: the follicle and the shaft. The hair follicle lies beneath the skin's surface. At the base is a cup-shaped sheath of cells and connective tissue that makes up the hair bulb. This structure contains sebaceous glands that produce an oily substance called sebum and receives nutrients from the blood via the dermal papilla, a cone-shaped formation that sits inside this area.

While in the follicle, hair is connected to blood vessels and nerves and is growing. But once hair makes its way out of the follicle and through the scalp, it hardens into a protein called keratin, which becomes the shaft, or a strand of hair.

MYTH: Wearing hats and wigs too often doesn't allow hair to breathe.

FACT: Hair doesn't need to breathe. Once a strand pops through the scalp, the hair is dead. Both hair and skin receive oxygen via the blood, but tension, such as that from a too-tight hat or wig, can hinder hair growth and damage follicles.

The hair shaft includes two to three layers. On the outside is the cuticle, a protective layer composed of overlapping cells that resemble scales or shingles. These safeguard the inner layers of the hair shaft, known as the cortex and medulla. The cortex determines the strength, moisture content, elasticity, shape, texture and color (from pigment cells called melanin) of hair. The medulla is mostly made of protein, but this layer is usually found only in thick or coarse hair.

MYTH: White folks' hair grows longer and faster than Black people's hair.

FACT: Typically, most everyone's hair grows at the rate of one half inch per month. This pace may increase or decrease slightly from month to month. The hair of some Black individuals grows at a slower rate than the tresses of Caucasians and Asians but not by much.

The average growth phase for scalp hair is from two to six years. But some individuals experience growth over shorter or longer periods.

Over the course of a few weeks, hair enters into a transitional period called the catagen phase. During this time, growth slows down and the hair follicle shrinks.

When hair stops forming, tresses are in the telogen (or resting) phase and reach their terminal length, which is the longest length any strand on a person's head can grow. Some people think their hair's terminal length is shorter than it actually is because hair can break off due to damage related to styling techniques, nutritional deficiencies, illness or other issues.

When the telogen phase ends, new growth begins, and old strands are shed. But the scalp never becomes completely bald because each strand of hair undergoes these stages at different times.

MYTH: Cutting the hair makes tresses grow faster.

FACT: Snipping strands doesn't speed their growth; doing so eliminates split ends so that hair appears healthier.

Here's another truth: Learn how to care for your hair and maintain a healthy lifestyle; your tresses are sure to grow longer in time.

How to Stimulate Hair Growth

Commonsense tips for longer, stronger tresses

- Use gentle products suited for your hair type and texture.
- Protect your hair from breakage with tools such as wide-tooth combs, and opt for wearing silk scarves to bed and sleeping on silk pillowcases. Cotton and nylon fibers can pull on tresses and dry out strands.
- Reduce over-manipulation of the hair with protective hairdos and gentle styling techniques, such as finger detangling.
- Avoid hairstyles that stress the hair follicles, such as tight braids or weaves.
- Don't apply too much heat to hair. Thermal styling appliances can cause the layers of the cuticle to open and weaken the hair shaft. Use these electrical devices correctly and with products that protect the hair from high temperatures.
- Keep your scalp clean. Be sure to moisturize both your hair and scalp.
- Give extra care and attention to hair that's exposed to chemical processes, such as relaxing and hair dyeing. The products used alter the strands of the hair by opening the cuticles, thereby

causing damage and making your mane susceptible to breakage.

- Protect hair from heat, cold, wind, sun and rain with the proper headgear and limit the time spent in harsh weather.
- Lead a healthy lifestyle by eating nutritious foods and exercising to boost your immune system. This can help you avoid illness and keep hair in tip-top shape.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.
http://beta.docker.realhealthmag.com/article/root-matter