



Hair Today, Gone Tomorrow

LET'S GET TO THE ROOT OF WHY WE'RE LOSING OUR STRANDS

BY NYKIA SPRADLEY
PHOTOGRAPHY BY TAKAHIRO OGAWA

You've been loyal to your locks—treating them to weekly deep conditionings, minimal heat styling, trims every six weeks—all the things you've been taught are the best practices for maintaining a healthy mane. But somehow your hair still seems to want to break up with you: It's been falling out in clumps, it's become see-through and your attempted pretty updo looks more like a struggle pony. Alopecia (the medical term for hair loss) is the fourth most common diagnosis in African-Americans. Our hair is our crown, our strength, our beauty. Watching it thin over time can be devastating. And while turning to wigs and weaves may seem like a sensible solution, many have learned the hard way that it only exacerbates the issue. So what are we to do? To find a fix, let's start with finding the cause. Read on to learn how to stop hair loss in its tracks.

H A I R



LIGHT IT UP

Tiny lasers in this FDA-approved band go deep into the hair follicle to increase blood flow and clear any waste that prevents strands from growing.

HAIRMAX LaserBand 82 (\$795, hairmax.com).

YOUR TRESSES

First it's important to understand what a healthy scalp looks like. "The cycle of hair growth consists of three stages: a growth, a rest and a shedding phase," explains Lucinda Ellery, hair loss expert and founder of the Lucinda Ellery Consultancy in New York City. At any point, your hair follicle is in one of these phases. Significant shedding is not normal. A few hairs on your bathroom floor every day isn't enough to go running for the Rogaine, but according to Michelle Henry, M.D., dermatologist and clinical instructor of dermatology at Weill Cornell Medical College in New York City, seeing a Ping-Pong-ball-size clump or anything bigger on a regular basis is cause for alarm. If the density of your mane is decreasing, you're more than likely experiencing some form of thinning that needs to be investigated. "Check the strands to see if the bulb is still attached," says Los Angeles-based trichologist Kari Williams, Ph.D. A visible round bulb (a clear coating

at the end of the strand) means that the hair is coming out from the follicle (from which the hair grows). That signals an internal issue. "If the bulb is not attached, it could be a sign of excessive breakage from styling, which may also make your hair thinner," she says.

YOUR GENES

The most common cause of major shedding in all women is female pattern hair loss, which is genetic. Many of the scarring variations—such as CCCA (central, centrifugal, cicatricial alopecia), typically seen in Black women—have a strong hereditary component. If it's in your DNA, then it's unpreventable, but before you panic know that if caught early it's usually treatable.

"In genetic hair loss, there is a gradual thinning of strands caused by the miniaturization of the follicle," says Lars Skjoth, founder of and head scientist for Harklinikken, a hair regrowth program. "In some cases, inflammation and signifi-

cant episodes of dandruff can herald the onset." Once the bulb is destroyed, the hair loss is permanent.

YOUR LIFE

A sudden decrease in hair density may be caused by a number of other factors, such as hormonal changes, stress or diet. "Hair follicles are very sensitive to hormonal shifts. The tendency to have hormonal hair loss can be genetic, but genetic hair loss is not always hormonal," says Henry. Again, it's critical to get a proper diagnosis from a dermatologist. What you don't want to risk is a temporary problem becoming a permanent one. The good news is that once you're able to stabilize diet or hormonal deficiencies, the problem should cease. "Chronic hair loss—due to factors like stress, diet, styling practices or illness—disrupt but doesn't destroy the follicle. The problem can last for many weeks or many months. Permanent hair loss is caused by the destruction of the hair follicle," says Henry. ▷

COURTESY OF BRAND

GET GROWING

MANE BOOSTERS HAVE COME A LONG WAY. CHECK OUT THESE OPTIONS

From pieces to pills, treatments for helping your hair flourish are widespread—and they work! Our experts give us the rundown so you can find the regrowth method that's right for you.

TEMPORARY TRESSES

Ellery focuses her practice on achieving immediate physical results while working on a long-term solution. She recommends using a hair prosthesis in addition to taking supplements and stimulants. Her Intralace System is a mesh-based hairpiece that's integrated into the user's own hair.

GROWTH POTIONS

Skjoth's Harklinikken program, which uses extracts that are custom-blended to suit a patient's needs, has made impressive strides. "In a lot of cases, we see such a combination of multiple factors contributing to the hair loss. Therefore immediate careful root-cause analysis is critical in identifying and minimizing the contributing factors," says Skjoth. Two widely used medications for hair regrowth are minoxidil and finasteride. A very small dosage of minoxidil, as well as ingredients derived from milk and plant sources, can be found in some Harklinikken treatments.

ROOT ZAPPERS

Red light therapy, which is a noninvasive in-office procedure, also helps reduce thinning and spur hair growth. At-home versions of the pro-grade red light

devices are just as effective. Lasers, like the HairMax LaserBand, are used to target the hair follicle to increase blood flow and detox the system.

BLOOD SHOTS

"PRP [platelet-rich plasma] is another hot topic in the world of hair loss," says Henry. With this treatment, the patient's blood is drawn, and the platelets are separated from the red blood cells, mixed with a substance that activates them and is then injected into the scalp. "Platelets contain many factors that can help stimulate hair growth," says Henry.

POWER FOODS

For temporary thinning due to stress or a prior illness, Henry suggests adding a biotin supplement to a healthy diet filled with lean proteins. "Food can be the best medicine or the worst poison," she says. She recommends incorporating the following items in The Healthy Hair Diet (below) into your own to help boost your do.

THE HEALTHY HAIR DIET

- Dark leafy greens, which are a great source of iron, can encourage the growth of tresses.
- Salmon helps add shine to locks.
- Lean proteins are important for upping strength and resisting breakage.
- Eggs, which contain biotin, help with growth and manage brittleness.

WEAVE WOES

In African-American women, I see a higher incidence of hair breakage and hair loss from tight and aggressive styling, also called traction alopecia," says dermatologist Michelle Henry. Essentially, there is trauma to the scalp due to styles that pull excessively on the hair, which creates tension at the root. While braids, twists, weaves and even lace-front wigs may seem like great protective options, they may be doing more harm than good. The pulling causes inflammation of the hair bulb, which, if ongoing, can become infected and lead to what's known as scarring alopecia. "Hair loss becomes permanent when scar tissue forms in the scalp and the hair follicle completely degenerates or disappears," says trichologist Kari Williams. This typically happens when the scalp has experienced major trauma caused by traction, chemical burns, excessive or incorrect use of chemical straighteners, or improperly treated fungal or bacterial infections. If damage hasn't completely been done, Houston dermatologist Milton Moore, M.D., says a doctor-prescribed antibiotic, as well as certain topical creams or ointments, may help get it under control. The other solution is simply to give your hair a break. If the damage is severe, such as hair loss caused by tight styling at the temples or the lateral scalp (hairline edges), Henry offers her patients mini transplants: "It's permanent and ideal for a patient whose medical treatments were unsuccessful."