



## TRESS STRESS

### Natural Ways to Prevent Hair Loss

by Jody McCutcheon

**A**ncient Egyptians sought to stem hair loss and stimulate hair growth with a cocktail of iron oxide, red lead, onions, alabaster, animal fats and honey. Today, we're still deploying creative approaches. Men's hair loss, specifically, is a billion-dollar industry, touting solutions ranging from chemically laced topical treatments and drugs to transplants and wigs. Yet hair-loss science is imperfect; it's riddled with

misinformation that allows companies to sell products of varying efficacy.

The average head holds about 120,000 to 150,000 strands of hair, and it's normal for both men and women to lose 50 to 100 strands daily. We lose hair for several reasons. Chiefly, aging weakens hair and makes it more brittle; it also decreases hormone production, slowing hair growth. According to a study published in the *Cleveland Clinic Journal of Medicine*, anything that

interrupts the normal hair cycle can trigger diffuse hair loss. Triggers include physiologic trauma and emotional stresses, nutritional deficiencies, endocrine imbalances and illness, as well as genetics, including pattern baldness. Even air and water pollutants and sunlight's phototoxic aging effects may facilitate alopecia (sudden hair loss).

While it's impossible to completely stop natural hair loss catalyzed by aging and genes, the rate can be controlled and abnormal loss may be reversed while stimulating growth.

**DIETARY CHANGES.** The typical North American fat-, protein- and salt-rich diet fosters an acidic environment in the body which can lead to premature hair loss. Iron-rich foods like lean red meats and dark green veggies contribute to ferritin levels sufficient to increase the hair's growth cycle. Iron also delivers oxygen to hair follicles, further inciting growth. In a review of related research, the journal *Clinical and Experimental Dermatology* reports that double-blind data confirmed the findings of a study in women with increased hair shedding in which a significant proportion responded to l-lysine and iron therapy.

Because hair is made mostly of protein, and protein deficiency is thought to cause hair loss, it would seem that consuming more protein would stimulate growth, although moderation is the key. Too much protein may result in baldness, according to Dr. Michael Eades, who owns *ProteinPower.com*.

The American Heart Association recommends against high-protein diets because most Americans already eat more protein than they need.

Omega-3 fatty acids found in fish, shellfish, nuts and seeds and their oils can facilitate the production and action of hormones and oily lubricants that effect a healthy scalp and follicles and bouncy, shiny hair.

A-complex and B-complex vitamins also are said to promote vibrant, shiny hair; B<sub>12</sub> to neutralize premature hair loss; vitamin C and zinc to help strengthen hair; biotin to avoid hair loss and premature graying; vitamin D to facilitate healthy follicular growth; and vitamin E to maintain a healthy, moisturized scalp.

Eating whole foods like organic eggs, lentils, spinach, red meat, pumpkin seeds and salmon is ideal, including plenty of fruits and vegetables for vitamins and minerals. Most vegetable skins are also rich in silica, which helps strengthen hair.

**DRINK MORE TEA.** Green tea, saw palmetto (or its extract) and stinging

nettle tea contain ingredients that inhibit the conversion of testosterone into dihydrotestosterone (DHT), a compound that's been linked to thinning hair and pattern baldness, according to *Medical News Today*. These products are used in battling some forms of alopecia and concentrated ingredients of these teas are available in pill form.

**DETOX.** Eliminating alcohol, tobacco and coffee can help. Excessive booze and caffeine lead to dehydration, which makes hair dry and brittle, and also dramatically depletes the body's iron and zinc levels. Cigarette smoke contains toxins that accelerate hair loss, as well as premature graying.

**CHILL OUT.** Stress is a widely known factor in hair loss, specifically of a condition called telogen effluvium (*Principles of Dermatology*, by James Marks and Jeffrey Miller). Meditation and exercise can relieve stress and create a better hormonal balance, thereby helping to prevent alopecia.

Massage of body and scalp also

may be beneficial. Adding oils such as almond or coconut infuses the scalp with essential vitamins and minerals. A study by the *Journal of Dermatology* shows that applying onion juice can lead to hair growth. Treat hair gently, air-drying rather than rubbing it with a towel.

**DON'T FAKE IT.** Using extensions and weaves or wearing tight wigs or hairpieces daily may damage hair follicles by stressing their anchor to the scalp, accelerating hair loss. Also, hair straighteners, tight pony tails, blow dryers and heated rollers may damage or break off follicles. Consider natural hair dyes.

**ESCHEW MOST SHAMPOOS.** Most commercial shampoos contain sodium laurel sulphate (SLS) or sodium laureth sulphate because it's inexpensive, lathers well and typically thickens hair via salt. SLS also corrodes follicles and impairs their ability to grow hair. Consider switching to organic shampoos and conditioners.

*Jody McCutcheon is a freelance editor in Toronto, Ontario, Canada.*