

WHAT'S UP

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When it comes to frizzing, breaking, itching, flaking, an ordinary stylist won't do.

By Michele Meyer

Let the real experts diagnose what's messing with your head.

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HERE COMES A POINT in every woman's life when she thinks her hair has lost its power to surprise.

If only it were true.

The fact is, hair is constantly changing, often in ways we don't expect. And the obvious culprits (harsh chemicals and detergents, overheated styling tools) may have some sneaky new accomplices, like hormones, medications, and stress.

When you have questions about your body's other changes, you make an appointment with your gynecologist, your ophthalmologist, your shrink. But when your hair needs a check-

Photograph by
Just Loomis

MAKEUP: SHALLY ZUCKER/CLOUTIER
HAIR: WILLIVALDO CARRILLO/CLOUTIER
STYLIST: XAVIER CABRERA/CLOUTIER

up, who do you call? To diagnose the most common—and maddening—head cases, we've consulted two kinds of experts: dermatologists (who treat hair as well as skin) and trichologists (self-styled "hair doctors" who hang out in fancy salons in cities like New York and London, pampering the tresses of Candace and Julia and Sigourney and Nicole). Trichologists don't have medical degrees, but they do have years of training in areas such as physiology, nutrition, and pharmacology. Like dermatologists, they can analyze the condition of a strand from the cuticle to the root.

We asked the specialists to put eight problems under their microscopes. Turn the page to discover their first-aid advice for stressed-out hair.

1 [SYMPTOM] Your hair's gone from dry to strawlike.

DIAGNOSIS: If you color or perm your hair, the problem likely starts there. Hormonal changes that begin in your thirties can make it worse, causing a slowdown in oil production in the follicles, the tiny tubes in the skin where hairs originate. Several conditions and medications also may dry out oil glands and decrease blood

circulation to the scalp (which has a dehydrating effect), says dermatologist Laurie Polis, director of the SoHo Skin and Laser Dermatology Group in New York City. These include antihistamines, antidepressants, the acne pill Accutane, and drugs that lower cholesterol and blood pressure. Other moisture thieves: smoking, stress, and thyroid disease.

PRESCRIPTION: You've heard the basic advice a million times: Avoid overprocessing; shampoo infrequently and use moisturizing formulas; don't fry your hair by turning the blow-dryer up too high or using it too close to your locks; and deep-condition once or twice a week.

If this doesn't restore resilience and you use a permanent dye, take a break for a few months and switch to a milder semi-permanent formula, Polis suggests. She also recommends alternating several shampoo brands: "It's the same concept as rotating crops. One crop strips the soil of certain nutrients, so you switch them around and it balances out."

Avoid styling products that contain methanol or ethanol, Polis says. These are simply synonyms for alcohol, which is to dry hair what gasoline is to a fire.

An arid scalp also tends to be itchy and cranky. Products like J.F. Lazartigue's Soothing Jelly for Sensitive Scalp and Bumble and Bumble Tonic can calm it down. And resist shampooing for a day or two before getting hair colored; the dirt and oil will protect your skin.

HAIR Rx: Phytorum Fortifying Shampoo, Clairol Herbal Essences Antidandruff Shampoo, Redken CAT Protein Reconstructing Treatment, J.F. Lazartigue Soothing Jelly for Sensitive Scalp, boar-bristle brush by di Prima, gentle hair bands by Frédéric Fekkai (leather) and Colette Malouf (metal).



2 [SYMPTOM] The light is out.

DIAGNOSIS: When the luster disappears, it's usually a sign that your cuticles are riled up, says Robert Gallagher, trichologist and owner of Long Hair Care Group Inc. in Manhattan. Healthy cuticles lie smooth against the hair shaft; the flat surface reflects light. (That's why curls are usually less glossy than straight hair.) Dye, perms, blow-drying, and UV rays all can cause cuticles to become rough and irregular. Age plays a role, too, Gallagher says: As your scalp gets drier, there's less oil to help cuticles stay slicked. Plus, gray hair tends to be more porous and uneven than strands that still have pigment; whether you color it or leave it alone, it's less apt to shine.

PRESCRIPTION: An easy fix: Ask your hairdresser for a cellophane glaze (also called a high-gloss). These add sheen and perk up color for four to six weeks.

At home, a conditioner can smooth cuticles and fill crags, but a lot of women use too much in the wrong places. The right way: Work a small dollop into tresses from the ears down, skipping the roots. Then rinse with cool water. This contracts the cuticle so it retains moisturizing ingredients; hot water washes them right out (and it's drying).

When styling, avoid mousse. "It's a dirt magnet," Gallagher says. Do consider a

silicone-based shine-enhancer, such as Sebastian Laminates Hi-Gloss Spray, but use it no more than three times a week or the silicone may instead turn hair dull. A clarifying formula, such as Pantene's Daily Clarifying Shampoo, can prevent buildup, too.

[SYMPTOM]

Your mane looks like it's lost some weight.

DIAGNOSIS: It's not your imagination; hair strands really can get skinnier over time. It happens because the 100,000 or so follicles on your scalp narrow infinitesimally as you age. "After a while, the bulb won't produce the same quality of hair," says Bertrand Thiery, a trichologist and general manager for J.F. Lazar-tigue in Manhattan. The new hairs also tend to be shorter than the brawny ones of youth. Anything that impedes blood circulation to follicles—say, medications—can hasten the process.

PRESCRIPTION: There's not much you can do to pump up your follicles, though some people think scalp massage and aerobic exercise might help by improving blood flow. But you can make your tresses *look* more robust. One counter-intuitive tactic: Opt for a permanent hair color over a semipermanent formula. The strong chemicals lift the cuticles and swell the shaft, adding body. (Two good ones to try at home: Clairol's Hydrience Permanent Haircolor Creme and L'Oréal's Excellence Creme.) Just be sure to use shampoos and conditioners that guard against dryness and breakage.

To add some bounce and fullness, keep your coif above shoulder length and get frequent trims. Before you blow-dry, spritz a little volumizer or thickening spray or gel—experts recommend Phytothérathrie Phytovolume Actif and Redken Thickening Lotion—onto your fingertips and massage throughout your towel-dried hair. (If your tresses are really fine, apply to the roots only; more could weigh hair down.) As the ingredients sink into the shaft they expand it, making each strand look fatter.

[SYMPTOM]

The texture has taken a turn for the coarse.

DIAGNOSIS: Blame those aging follicles again. As they shrink they also can become distorted in shape, and the hairs they squeeze out may be more gnarled than in the past, says Philip B., a trichologist at the Mark Garrison salon in Manhattan and founder of his own hair-care line. Damaged cuticles can make bristly strands seem even coarser. Your new texture might spring another surprise on you: Wiry hair is harder to penetrate; hence it's more resistant to dye.

PRESCRIPTION: There's nothing you can do to change your hair's shape, so your best strategy is to keep your cuticles healthy by guarding against dryness, Philip B. says. Also bear in mind that permanent colors adhere better than semi-permanent formulas.

[SYMPTOM]

The life's drained from the color.

DIAGNOSIS: Turning gray isn't the only way color changes as you age, Polis says. Production of the various pigments, or melanin, that make up your shade may fluctuate throughout your life (think of the towheaded kid who's now a brunette). For many women, the lighter glinting tones that make youthful hair so vibrant are the first to peter out. What's more, white hair is porous because it has no melanin; it can suck up chemicals in tap water, becoming yellow and dull. Residues from styling products may make it even mousier.

PRESCRIPTION: First off, grab a hat and choose styling products with sunscreen. "No doubt about it, UV rays take natural color from the hair, not just artificial color," says Philip Kingsley, a trichologist in New York and London.

To boost your hue, try a semipermanent dye such as L'Oréal Casting Color-Spa, or a color-enhancing product, like

Aveda's Pure Plant shampoos, that leaves behind traces of temporary tint. Avoid henna; it's ultradrying, and you can't color over it if you tire of the shade. Cleansers made for gray hair (like the Sterling Solutions line) keep yellowness at bay.

[SYMPTOM]

Suddenly the shade's all wrong.

DIAGNOSIS: Surprise! The pigment in your skin, like that in your hair, lightens over time, Polis says. "If you stick with the same dye, it'll look garish." Your hair's natural tone may have changed, too, Thiery says. "The base for the color is different, so the results will be also."

PRESCRIPTION: It's time to rethink your color scheme. You're best off consulting a pro, at least at first, to figure out which shade works best with your paler complexion, Thiery says. If you color at home, Clairol's Ultrass Custom Colour has an accent tube so you can rev up the shade or tone it down to suit your complexion and your mood.

But don't stop there, Polis says. Your makeup might also need fine-tuning to flatter your new coloring. Beauty pros at cosmetics counters, salons, and spas can advise you on what to update.

[SYMPTOM]

You're shedding—a lot.

DIAGNOSIS: It's normal to lose about 100 strands a day, but a sudden increase usually means something in your life is changing, says Wilma F. Bergfeld, head of clinical dermatology research at the Cleveland Clinic Foundation. It may simply be your estrogen levels or even the seasons (humans tend to molt in spring and fall, just as other mammals do). Major stresses—a move, a divorce, a serious illness or injury, even a crash diet—can also induce follicles to go into a resting phase, leading to heavy shedding known as telogen effluvium. (You may not realize hair loss is stress-related because it occurs three to six months

after the traumatic event, Bergfeld says.)

If skimpiness continues for more than a few months—and your hairline recedes, your part widens, or your scalp starts to peek through your do—chances are the culprit is androgenic alopecia (or male pattern baldness). This inherited condition causes visible thinning in half of all women over age 50.

PRESCRIPTION: An above-the-shoulder, layered cut can lend fullness. Coloring locks a lighter shade and messing with your part—maybe slanting it from right to left—also help by minimizing the contrast with your scalp. Instead of hair-sprays that leave tresses stiff and prone to breakage, try a flexible-hold version.

Though baldness medications are typically used by men, minoxidil (Rogaine), a topical liquid that awakens follicles from hibernation and stops them from shrinking, works on women too. Eighty percent stop losing hair, Bergfeld says; about 40 percent get some regrowth. New hair isn't noticeable for at least four months; if there's no change after a year, you're out of luck. You can get minoxidil in a

2 percent solution by itself or in Paul Mitchell's Rogaine kit for women, which also contains a scalp-preparation shampoo and a body-building treatment. Or try the 5 percent version now available over the counter. (Don't be put off that it's marketed to men.)

Other options include hair extensions or wiglets—as long as they're clipped on. Extensions have become quite realistic-looking, but many are sewn, woven, or glued in, which thinning hair can't handle, says Christopher Mackin, resident trichologist at the Elizabeth Arden Red Door Salon and Spa in New York. For many women, the simplest, most satisfactory solution is a fabulous wig. The new Cheryl Tiegs collection by Revlon is designed for comfort as well as fashion.

[SYMPTOM]

You're flaking out.

DIAGNOSIS: Either excessive dryness or oiliness may be to blame. So might residue from styling products, which can

look like dandruff. Stress is another major trigger, apparently because it suppresses the immune system and allows yeast (a common scalp colonizer) to thrive unchecked, says Jerome L. Shupack, professor of clinical dermatology at New York University School of Medicine. The pesky organism produces an excess of dead skin cells.

PRESCRIPTION: If oiliness is the villain, a mild nonmedicated shampoo may be all you need to banish specks, Shupack says. If product buildup is the problem, try adding a clarifying cleanser to your routine. Stubborn flaking often responds to over-the-counter antidandruff formulas or a prescription antifungal shampoo designed to kill yeast.

Last but not least, try kneading your scalp several minutes a day. It gets blood flowing to the area, which can only help your hair. More important, scalp massage is a great stress reducer—and when it comes to preventing dandruff, keeping a cool head may be your best defense. ■

Michele Meyer writes often about beauty.