

FOODS THAT FEED OUR FOLLICLES



by Judith Fertig

While common hair loss is not life threatening, it's a condition that merits our attention, because it may diminish a man's or a woman's self-esteem and negatively affect how he or she faces the world.

Hair experts estimate that people normally have a maximum of about 100,000 individual hairs on their head. Approximately 90 percent are usually in a growth phase while the other 10 percent "rest." After growing for two to three months, the hair will fall out and the growth cycle of the follicle, or hair root, starts again. An average person naturally sheds about 100 hairs a day.

Under certain conditions, however, the normal cycling can be interrupted. The resting, or telogen, phase could last longer, with more hair falling out and less new hair growing. Some hair loss may be associated with mind-body response to surgery, new medications, thyroid issues, trauma or a highly restrictive crash diet. Hair loss might be the effect of inherited male pattern

baldness or thinning that may accompany aging. In other instances, the cause may be poor nutrition, as attested to by American Academy of Dermatology research.

Start with Nutrition

"The first step in diagnosing a probable cause of hair loss is to check nutrition," says Dr. William Rassman, an award-winning pioneer in hair restoration, founder of the New Hair Institute, in Los Angeles, editor of *BaldingBlog.com* and co-author of the book, *Hair Loss and Replacement for Dummies*.

Other experts agree that including certain key nutrients in our diet can help prevent, and even reverse, some hair loss. "The same foods that are good for your body and overall health are good for your hair, including foods that

are high in protein and low in carbohydrates, with a reduced fat content,” says Dr. Michael Reed, a dermatologist with New York University’s (NYU) Langone Medical Center, in New York City (MichaelLorinReed.com).

Key Nutrition Tips

Generally, a diet that supports both scalp and hair health is rich in protein; vitamins A, B complex and C; minerals like iron and zinc; and omega-3 fatty acids.

Vitamin A: Found in green leafy vegetables like Swiss chard and spinach, as well as in carrots, it helps the scalp produce sebum, hair’s natural conditioner.

Vitamin B₁₂: “The requirement for vitamin B₁₂ is very low,” says vegan Registered Dietitian Reed Mangels, “but it is needed for cell division and blood formation.” Foods such as organic eggs, cage-free poultry and grass-fed red meat are good sources; vegetarian and vegan sources include nutritional yeast (dried yellow flakes or powder, with a cheese-like flavor), vitamin B₁₂-fortified soy or rice milk, and similarly fortified breakfast cereal.

Iron: Samantha Heller, a registered dietitian and nutritionist at the NYU Medical Center, warns women that the potential deficiency of iron that often occurs during their reproductive years can lead to anemia, a reduction of red blood cells that is often an undiagnosed cause of hair loss. Foods like broccoli and brewer’s yeast help boost iron levels.

Omega-3 fatty acids: “Omega-3 fatty acids are important for total body and

skin health, and that includes your scalp,” says Heller, author of *Get Smart: Samantha Heller’s Nutrition Prescription for Boosting Brain Power and Optimizing Total Body Health*. “Many Americans are not getting enough of these in their diets.” These essential fatty acids are widely found in flaxseed, hemp milk and seeds, walnuts, soy, canola oil and fish.

Protein: Protein helps the body build many kinds of cells, including hair. Lentils and kidney beans provide a healthy amount of protein, plus iron and biotin, which especially help hair and nails stay strong and healthy, says Andrea Giancoli, a registered dietitian and spokeswoman for the American Dietetic Association.

Zinc: A zinc deficiency can lead to shedding more hair than usual, notes Dawn Jackson Blatner, a Chicago-based registered dietitian. Zinc is found in all kinds of beans, beef, whole grains and walnuts.

“Although eating healthier is always beneficial, that alone may not prevent or stop genetic, hormonal or age-related types of hair loss,” counsels Rassman. His practice has confirmed that more often, genetics are behind male pattern hair loss, which can sometimes start in the teenage years. If nutrition has been ruled out as the pivotal cause, visiting a hair loss specialist is suggested to see what else can be done.

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