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losing it over hair loss?

De-tangle the truth from myths and keep your hair healthy

■ BY DR RAJESH RAJPUT

Hair fall is a fact of life, yet every time we experience heavy hair loss we panic quietly. Here we debunk some common myths about hair loss to help you get hair savvy. Treat yourself right and get yourself a healthy mane.

WHAT WE BELIEVE

Hereditary hair loss cannot be treated

NOT TRUE

THE FACTS: If there are so many hereditary health conditions—asthma, blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease—that can be treated, why not hair loss? Hair-loss conditions can improve in just 2 to 4 months and continue to respond with the Cyclical Medicine Programme. This hair-loss treatment was developed at Mumbai's Dr L. H. Hiranandani Hospital and published in the *International Hair Transplant Forum* (December 2008), the journal of International Society for Hair Restoration. The programme involves prescribing medicines that contain vitamins, anti-oxidants and enzyme blockers on different days and in monitored doses in a cyclical manner. Natural hair growth takes place in a 4-month-long cycle. For the therapy to work, it must act in one complete cycle. The cyclical treatment controls hair fall in 2 months and promotes hair growth in 4 months.

Beware of fly-by-night hair-loss clinics where patients are given costly treatments for months and then finally told that their hair loss can't be treated because it is 'hereditary'. It is true that the number of sensitive roots that you have, or are likely to lose, is determined by birth but you

can protect and strengthen these roots with suitable treatment.

TRESS TIP: If you have inherited weak hair from your parents, take extra care. Avoid chemical treatments and harsh hair products.

WHAT WE BELIEVE

Medicines can only stop further hair loss but cannot grow new hair

NOT TRUE

THE FACTS: You lose hair as a result of gradual miniaturisation of the follicles. First, the rate of hair growth slows down, then it thins in diameter, becoming less pigmented. Finally it falls off and does not grow back. This hair follicle is now dead. However, some follicles are in a sleeping phase. These can be activated by medicines. Therefore, patients can grow back 30% new hair in a matter of 2 to 4 months. With properly planned hair-loss programmes, the progress of baldness can not only be stopped but also reversed to make it at least two stages better.

TRESS TIP: Each hair follicle has a 4-month-long sleeping phase. In order to see lasting results, you need to take medicines for a long duration, say 1 to 1½ years.

WHAT WE BELIEVE

Medicines do not work after a particular age or particular grade of hair loss

NOT TRUE

THE FACTS: At every age, there are roots that are in the resting phase, have residual capacity to grow and



OPENING IMAGE: PHOTO: HILMAAR, HILMAAR, MODEL: COREY, SARAH, TOP: BETTY IMAGES/ASSIGN SERVICES, STOCKBYRE

ture. Oil can indirectly protect hair but it cannot grow hair.

TRESS TIP: To boost blood circulation in the scalp, use hot oil for massage. Make sure it's not too hot. The effect lasts for 15 to 20 minutes at least.

WHAT WE BELIEVE

You should not lose more than 20 hair strands in a day or else you will go bald

NOT TRUE

THE FACTS: Hair loss is a natural process. At any time 20% of your hair could be in the falling phase. Losing 20-100 hair strands in a day is normal. Please do remember that you don't go bald just because you are shedding hair. You go bald only when fallen hair is not replaced with new hair. If that is the case, then there are medicines that can restore the natural cycle of hair

formation, growth, fall and re-formation. However, there's no medicine that can completely stop hair loss. You can improve total hair volume by eating healthy, reducing stress and using quality products.

TRESS TIP: Exposure to extreme weather leads to hair loss, for instance, sitting directly below an AC vent in your office, or stepping out in the cold without covering your head.

WHAT WE BELIEVE

Shampoos should be avoided during hair fall

NOT TRUE

THE FACTS: What you see on your bathroom floor while shampooing is hair that broke over the last few days

and got washed out. Not shampooing hair, therefore, is not going to stop hair fall. It is essential to maintain good hair hygiene and wash hair regularly. Accumulation of sweat, sebum, exfoliated cells, dandruff, dust and dirt invite infection and aggravate hair loss. Use a mild shampoo that mentions 'regular use' or 'daily use' on the label. Do not use formulated shampoos every day as these are harsh, cause dryness and break the hair.

TRESS TIP: Formulated shampoos/conditioners are slowly on their way out. As we said, mild shampoos are best for daily use. If you want a special formulation, use it no more than twice a week.

WHAT WE BELIEVE

Shaving your head will improve hair growth

NOT TRUE

THE FACTS: When hair grows after a shave, it looks thicker as the strands



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are very short. This is an optical illusion. Shaving does not improve hair growth. In fact, you continue to lose hair but it goes unnoticed because the hair strands are very short. Also, shaving your head repeatedly can cause skin cuts, loss of the protective outer layer of the epidermis, making the scalp susceptible to the sun and environmental damage. Chances of getting a skin infection also increase this way.

TRESS TIP: Smoking, too, leads to hair loss. So kick the butt.

WHAT WE BELIEVE

Hair medicines are anti-hormonal NOT TRUE

THE FACTS: Hair loss medicines do not act against any hormone. There is no hormone that directly affects hair. Testosterone cannot affect hair roots, however when it gets converted to the chemical DHT it results in hair loss. Hair medicines have selective enzyme blockers that prevent the formation of DHT, even though testosterone levels

remain unaffected. Since a majority of people are unaware of this fact, they prefer herbal medicines over allopathic medicines in the misplaced belief that they are safer and don't have side effects. The irony is that herbal and homeopathic remedies, too, act by blocking DHT.

TRESS TIP: Avoid using OTC medicated formulation like Mintop without a doctor's supervision. Such formulations just extend the growth phase of hair follicle. The effect is short-lived. For overall better hair health you will need to eat better and take vitamins.

WHAT WE BELIEVE

Hair loss indicates a serious underlying illness IT'S TRUE

THE FACTS: It is known that thyroid imbalance, polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS), severe anaemia, low calcium, renal failure, liver disease can all cause hair loss. But these changes in the body will cause a failure of many other systems—more important than your hair—before causing hair loss. It is unlikely that you would have these conditions only because you are experiencing hair loss and have not experienced any other symptoms. Therefore, chasing doctors for tests based only on this may not be essential.

TRESS TIP: Eat a balanced diet rich in salads, sprouts, mushrooms, chickpeas, curd and ghee to make your hair strong and lustrous. ■

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