

# This Is What Your Hair's Condition Is Really Saying About Your Health



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If you've been trying to grow out your [bangs](#) since last summer with no success, or your oily scalp can't be tamed by heavy-duty dry shampoo, there's a chance you should stop dropping cash on salon treatments and pencil in a trip to your doctor. Common hair issues that we bitch about daily—from dandruff to hair falling out, or locks that just refuse to grow—can actually be the cause of some health issue, like a simple vitamin deficiency that requires a daily supplement (not a daily hair mask.)

**Dr. Wolfeld** is a New York-based plastic surgeon who specializes in hair transplantation ([among other things](#)) and explained that if the condition of your hair changes for no apparent reason (as in, you didn't just [bleach it peroxide-white](#)), you should pay attention. "Hair that becomes more brittle or fragile with poor growth can be a sign of vitamin and protein deficiencies. This may be seen in women who are malnourished; possibly because of a crash diet or not eating enough essential vitamins in their diet, such as fatty acids and zinc," he explained. There are hair-related symptoms that could hint at a different health issue too—from a hormone imbalance to [stress](#)—and we're breaking it all down when you keep scrolling.

**Dandruff:** First of all, some good news—dandruff isn't usually a cause of hair loss and usually doesn't mean there's anything wrong with your overall health. "For most people, dandruff does not reflect an issue with an individual's health," Dr. Wolfeld told us, though it's occasionally related to a medical condition like seborrheic dermatitis, psoriasis, fungal infections of the scalp, or eczema. Concerned? See your doctor.

**Hair falling out:** It's normal to lose a little hair, but if you're seeing more fall out than usual, ask to be tested for hypothyroidism or anemia. "Increased hair shedding can be seen with new medical conditions or exacerbations of chronic medical conditions. This can be seen commonly with an imbalance in thyroid hormones, diabetes, iron-deficiency anemia, lupus, and inflammatory bowel diseases," Dr. Wolfeld said. Emotional or psychological stress could also explain your recent hair loss, as could some medications (ask our doctor!).

In terms of treatment, young women are usually given minoxidil. "This is a solution or foam that may be purchased over the counter and is applied to the scalp daily and can help to maintain and thicken hair. Minoxidil works by increasing the duration of the hair-follicle growth cycle, which then improves the quality of the hair by increasing the diameter and length of fine hair," Dr. Wolfeld explained. Another option is the prescription medication [spironolactone](#). While it's usually used to treat high blood pressure, it can also have "anti-androgen properties" that improve your hair's thickness.

**Very oily scalp:** Aside from forcing you to carry travel-sized [dry shampoo](#) wherever you go, an oily scalp caused by overproductive sebaceous glands could reflect a number of things, such as unbalanced or changed [hormones](#), a new diet, or simply genetics. Dr. Wolfeld recommends obviously trying to control the shine with regular shampooing, but if this doesn't help for long, you should see a health-care pro to look into more serious conditions. "Other medical causes of oily scalp can be considered, such as seborrheic dermatitis. With this condition, yellow oily patches may be seen, and there is excessive sebum production. Psoriasis is another scalp condition that may cause oily hair if the sebaceous glands are overproductive," he explained.



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**Itchy scalp:** "Persistent itchy scalps may be a sign of skin conditions such as seborrheic dermatitis or scalp psoriasis," explained Dr. Wolfeld. Psoriasis is an autoimmune disease that causes raised reddish, scaly patches on the skin or scalp. "Other causes include allergic reactions, eczema, and a reaction to certain dyes, shampoos, or hair treatments."

**Texture is changing:** If your hair texture changed for no reason, it could mean your hormones are out of whack. "This is seen in women that age and have a variation in their hormone balance, and in younger women during pregnancy," Dr. Wolfeld said, adding that some drugs such as thyroid medications and [oral contraceptives](#) could also cause the shift. If that doesn't seem likely, you might also want to consider taking a supplement because "a deficiency in certain vitamins such as vitamin A, biotin, zinc, and fatty acids can lead to a change in the texture of hair." So, think supplements rather than hair products to address this issue.

**Hair won't grow:** If it feels like your bangs are taking forever to grow out, that usually technically means the growth phase of the hair cycle is shorter than normal and there is less growth of the hair shaft. A big reason hair does not grow can be a "deficiency of vitamins and protein in your diet." On the other hand, though, you could just be too trigger happy with the heat-styling tools or need to give your hair a rest from being colored.

**Going gray early:** "The reason a woman's hair turns gray is that as she ages, the number of pigment cells in hair follicles gradually decline," Dr. Wolfeld said. Then, because you don't have as much melanin, the hair becomes gray or white as it grows. "Most Caucasians start going gray in their mid-30s and are considered to be premature if gray hair is apparent by age 20," he explained. Generally, this isn't a sign of something wrong with your health—the reason someone's hair turns gray early is not completely known, but genetics is thought to be a major factor. Contrary to what you might think, Dr. Wolfeld says that stress—emotional, psychologic, or physiologic—doesn't cause you to go gray.

