

Pulling Comb Through Hair Can Be Frightening Experience

By Dr. Wesley Wilborn
Special To The Post

One of the most frightening experiences that a woman can have is to pull a comb through her "crowning glory" and find handfuls of hair still in the comb teeth.

Sometimes hair loss is a cause for serious alarm but there are times when simple adjustments in grooming techniques can solve the problem.

The following is a discussion of the many causes of hair loss in females with some practical tips to inform the public and to assist the hairstylist in evaluating, managing or referring hair loss problems.

Hair loss can be caused by breakage of the hair shaft for which there are two basic reasons:

-A hereditary defect in the hair shaft.

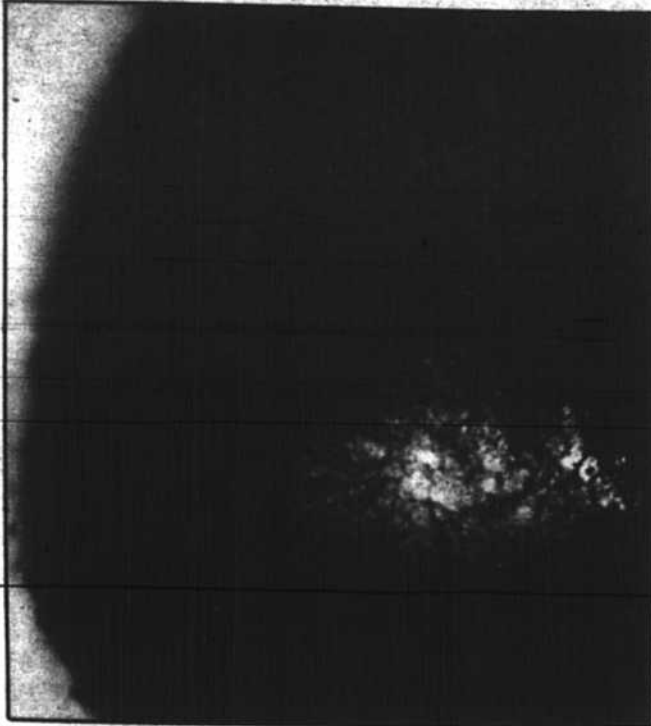
-Damaging hairstyling or grooming techniques.

Hereditary defects occur early in life and are rarely dealt with by the hairstylist. The acquired hair shaft defects, however, are the main concerns here.

Chemical straightening and curling agents are the chief causes of hair breakage. The over-processing can occur in both the relaxing or neutralization stages. The end result is the same, a weakened hair shaft that breaks immediately or gradually over a period of time.

This hair cannot be restored and only very gentle handling and time will correct the problem. After chemical damage, very little can be done to restore the strength of the hair shaft. Changing to a shorter style or wearing a hair piece may be necessary for a while.

Hair breakage can also be caused by hot combs and curling irons. Too much heat or too frequent



ALOPECIA. Too tightly rolled hair or ponytails can result in bald spots.

use of these appliances can weaken the hair shaft leading to a progressive hair loss. This is most evident along the scalp margins.

Hair breakage can also occur in unprocessed hair, especially in blacks. This is due to the natural curling or kinking of the negroid hair that makes styling difficult. Unless a moisturizing, softening or lubricating product is used on the hair, excessive breakage can occur from combing or brushing.

A very common form of hair loss, marginal or traction alopecia, occurs in black females. This is caused by tight ponytails and braids, pulling the hair from its roots. In adults this pattern is caused by rolling the hair too tightly or using curling irons too frequently. The hair is generally lost in the temporal and frontal areas of the scalp. Years of this abuse will cause permanent hair loss, but early

recognition and corrective action will prevent this.

Another common, and, indeed, one of the most frightening types of hair loss occurs after childbirth. This is known as telogen effluvium.

To explain it, we need to understand the hair cycle.

This cycle is divided into three repetitive phases. At any given time, hairs on the scalp will be in each of these phases.

1) Anagen, or the active growing phase which lasts for three to five years in most races.

2) Catagen, or the transitional stage between growing and resting hair. This



Chemical agents and incorrect grooming techniques contribute to hair damage.

lasts for approximately two weeks.

3) Telogen, or the resting phase, which usually lasts three to six months. At this time the hair is shed with a small whitish root or bulb called a "club."

These club hairs represent approximately 10 to 15 percent of the total scalp hair at any given time and are randomly scattered over the scalp.

Normally one loses between 50 to 100 hairs daily, with club ends, but we usually don't notice it because that are scattered. But, in telogen effluvium, the rate of shedding is increased to a noticeable degree.

During the last stage of pregnancy, it is currently felt that there is a slow-down in the conversion

from the growing phase (anagen) to the shedding (telogen) phase, with a resultant retention of hairs.

After delivery, the hormonal changes that caused the retention returns to normal and a larger number of hairs then begin to shed - usually 1 1/2 to six months after delivery.

No treatment is required for this, and the excess shedding is usually over in six months.

Similar patterns may follow early termination of pregnancy, termination of birth control pill use, high fever and use of some medication.

Another not uncommon form of hair loss is a condition called alopecia areata. In its simplest term it's "allergy to one's self."

In this condition com-

pletely bald patches occur that are usually round or oval. The scalp normal in feel and appearance and there are usually no other symptoms. When all of the scalp hair is lost, it is called alopecia totalis. When the hair is lost over the entire body, it is called alopecia universalis. In the mild form the hair may regrow without treatment, but it may reoccur in a significant percentage of cases. These individuals should be evaluated by a dermatologist.

Scarring alopecia, another form of hair loss, results when a disease or other inflammatory process damages the skin on the scalp and causes scarring and destruction of the hair follicles. This can result from years of using a hot comb. It is most likely due to hot grease getting down into the pores, causing an inflammation in and around the follicle. This occurs primarily on the top of the head.

-Discoid Lupus Erythematosus can also cause a scarring alopecia. It is a serious disease requiring medical attention. It causes atrophy of the scalp and bald spots. The affected area is usually thinned and whitish, though some area may be darkened.

A form of scarring alopecia common in blacks is that caused by repeated episodes of infections that cause hair bumps - or folliculitis.

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