

HealthyLIFE



A matter beyond beauty

Hair loss in women is often a symptom of hidden but treatable health problems

BY ALISON FREEHLING
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Three years ago, Ruth Caton began to notice more strands of her once-thick hair falling out in her brush. By last year, her hair had thinned so much that her scalp was clearly visible at the top of her head.

"It was very obvious and upsetting," said Caton, who also struggled with weight gain and dizzy spells. "I just didn't feel good about myself."

After seeing several different doctors, the 63-year-old Gloucester woman finally got a diagnosis: her thyroid, a small gland in the neck that regulates metabolism, wasn't producing enough hormones. That explained her hair loss, which quickly reversed itself after she started taking medication.

To most people, the word "balding"

immediately conjures up images of older men, along with plenty of jokes about receding hairlines and bad rugs. But doctors say there's another group of people struggling with thinning hair who need serious attention: women.

"It's way more common than people would think," said Dr. Leslie Coker, a dermatologist in Hampton. "I'd say I see people at least several times a week — some of them tearful from the start. I think women are a little more sensitive because we're not 'supposed to' lose our hair."

Hair loss in women can be a symptom of a chronic illness, a side effect of medication or the result of hormonal shifts during aging. In all cases, the emotional impact can be high.

Some 30 million women in the United States have significant hair loss, according

Please see HAIR LOSS/D2

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY HEATHER S. HUGHES/DAILY PRESS

HEALTH EDITION

How to...

Deal with sensitive teeth

Does the thought of digging into an ice cream cone make you cringe?

You're not alone. More than 45 percent of Americans suffer from sensitive teeth, according to national surveys. Many of them experience sudden, sharp pains whenever they eat or drink hot, cold, sweet or sour items — or even breathe in cold air.

In many cases, the problem is damage to gums that normally cover the roots of teeth and internal nerves. In addition to regular brushing and flossing, try these tips from the Academy of General Dentistry:

► **Brush properly, using a gentle, circular motion.** Dentists say at least half and as many as 90 percent of Americans scrub too hard, which destroys gum tissue as well as enamel (the protective coating on teeth). Test yourself: If the bristles on your toothbrush are pointing in many directions, you're applying too much pressure.

► **Buy toothbrushes with soft bristles.** Replace them at least every two or three months or whenever they begin to show wear.

► **Avoid drinks with citric acid,** including sodas, lemonade and orange juice. The ingredient can wear away enamel and expose nerves.

► **Drink with a straw.** Sucking in liquids will take them further back in



your mouth and away from your teeth.

► **See a dentist if sensitivity lasts more than a few days.** Pain can be a sign of a cavity, infected area or gum disease. Your dentist also might be able to recommend soothing products such as toothpaste, fluoride rinses or gels for sensitive teeth.

► **Be wary of whitening products.** The bleaching ingredients in toothpaste and other items for at-home use can make pain worse. Talk to your dentist before trying them.

—By Alison Freehling

"How to" is a weekly feature on health, nutrition and fitness. To suggest a topic, call 247-4789 or send e-mail to afreehling@dailypress.com. ■



Get Serious!

TONY GABRIELE

What's the real assessment of pricey estates?

I had to look twice to be sure that I was seeing my neighbor Babble correctly.

He was striding about his lawn, clad in tweeds, an ascot around his neck and a riding crop under his arm.

"Top of the morning, old bean," he said as I approached, in a vaguely British accent. "Uh, or should that be 'Bean of the morning, old top?'"

Are you off to a costume party, Babble? I asked.

"Not at all," he said. "I'm just trying to dress and behave in a manner that befits my station."

And what station might that be? "Why, being a member of the landed gentry, of course. A country squire."

Landed gentry? What, did somebody sell you some swampland in North Carolina? What land have you got?

"Why this, of course," he said, pointing

Please see GET SERIOUS/D2

POP CULTURE 101 | MOVIE MOMENT

'Shrek'

Shrek tries to frighten Donkey with a mighty roar.

Donkey: Wow, that was really scary. And if you don't mind me saying, if that don't work, your breath will certainly get the job done, 'cause you definitely need some Tic Tacs or something ... 'cause your breath stinks!



INSIDE

Racial harmony

Interracial group is a sensation in South Africa. **D2**



Trophy families

Readers sound off on the importance of trophies for youth. **Ask Amy, D7**

COMING/TOMORROW

Is it still must-see TV?

Looking back as NBC looks to the future with its new Thursday-night lineup.



'Placebo effect' plays games with the mind

The mind-body connection can be a powerful force in healing and even in illnesses.

BY ROSIE MESTEL/LOS ANGELES TIMES

Crocodile dung, bloodletting, pills dispensed from impressive apothecary jars: Medical history is littered with treatments that likely didn't work — except to the extent that people believed in them.

Here are some tidbits about the mind-body connection that science refers to as the "placebo effect":

■ The word "placebo" is Latin for "I shall please." In medieval times it was the first word of (and name for) a prayer chanted over the dead, and became a derogatory name for mourners who were hired to do the chanting.

■ By the 18th century, "placebo" was a term for any commonplace medical remedy. By the early 19th century, a

medical dictionary defined the word as "any medicine adopted more to please than benefit the patient."

■ The term "placebo effect" was coined by Harvard anesthesiologist Dr. Henry Beecher. He studied placebos after witnessing wounded World War II soldiers receive injections of salt solution instead of morphine when battlefield supplies had run out. The patients experienced considerable relief, as if they had received a drug.

■ Because of this effect,

modern drug trials generally contain a group of patients receiving a placebo instead of the medication being tested, and neither patient nor doctor knows who gets what. (The Food and Drug Administration in the 1970s recommended new drugs be tested this way.)

■ One of the most dramatic examples of a placebo effect was demonstrated in 1959 for a then-common surgery for angina, in which surgeons tied off arteries in the chest to increase the flow of blood to the heart.

Seattle physician Dr. Leonard Cobb showed the procedure was no better than a sham surgery in which the chest was incised but no arteries tied. The procedure was dropped.

■ Placebo effects vary depending on the condition. Researchers have reported that a placebo is better at easing symptoms of depression, anxiety, pain, asthma and moderate hypertension. It's poor at alleviating symptoms of schizophrenia or obsessive-compulsive disorders.

■ There are a few reports of patients becoming addicted to placebo pills. One patient swallowed 10,000 placebos in one year. Another went through withdrawal symptoms when the placebos were taken away.

■ Belief can foster ill effects as well as good ones: People who think a treatment will give them side effects can suffer nausea, rashes, headaches and pain from what is actually a placebo. This is known as the "nocebo effect" — Latin for "I shall harm." ■

► **HAIR LOSS** Continued from D1

Many factors affect hair loss

to the American Academy of Dermatology. Dr. Ted Daly, a New York dermatologist who is a national expert on the subject, puts the rate at a minimum of a third of all women (as compared to half of all men). Another group, the American Hair Loss Association, says women make up about 40 percent of all hair loss cases.

Common medical causes include thyroid problems, anemia and a condition called polycystic ovary syndrome, or the growth of fluid-filled sacs on the ovaries along with high levels of male hormones. Other women will shed hairs temporarily after childbirth, crash dieting, surgery or emotional stress.

"A lot of times it's not just a cosmetic issue," said Dr. Karen Agersborg, an endocrinologist in Newport News. "That's why it's very important to get a correct diagnosis."

But just like men, otherwise healthy women can develop "pattern" baldness or thinning. Changing hormone levels, aging and genetics all can play roles. In men, doctors know that a byproduct of the hormone testosterone shrinks hair follicles so they can't support new growth. But because women lose their hair in very different patterns than men, the triggers likely aren't the same.

"Clearly, understanding is lacking," said Daly, who treats many women in his practice on Long Island, N.Y. "There are multiple factors, some of which may be the same as in men. Estrogen also may play a role, but how it actually works — we're just not sure. There certainly is a need for more research."

Compared to male pattern balding, thinning in women tends to strike faster and over more areas of the head. The connection between aging and hair loss also doesn't seem as strong in women. Daly has treated girls as young as 15 or 16, and Coker sees as many 20- and 30-something patients as she does older women. Most of them have relatives who also have thinning hair or bald patches.

While nobody enjoys going bald, women are at particular risk for anxiety and depression, doctors say. Men with shiny domes can still be "macho" — especially since testosterone often is a factor — but the beauty ideal for women of all ages includes long, thick hair.

"There's so much pressure for us to look a certain way," Agersborg said. "There certainly are no supermodels — or any models, for that matter — with thinning hair."

Many women are too embarrassed to ask for help or get little attention from busy doctors. They often get by with hats or new hairstyles.



Hair facts

■ By the 22nd week of development, a human fetus has all of its hair follicles formed — roughly 5 million on the whole body, a million on the head and 100,000 on the scalp. Follicles are tubular spaces that hold hair roots and nourish them with tiny blood vessels.

■ Hair is made of a strong structural protein called keratin, the same material found in nails and outer skin layers. Each strand

has three layers; the inner two hold the pigments that give hair its color.

■ Humans are covered all over in hair, except on the palms of the hands, soles of the feet and the lips.

■ Hair grows at an average rate of a half-inch a month, or six inches a year.

■ Each hair grows for two to six years, then rests for two to three months and falls out before a new hair begins to grow. Losing

50 to 100 hairs a day is normal.

■ At any one time, about 85 percent of the hair on a person's scalp is growing and 15 percent is resting. Baldness occurs when hair falls out but new hair does not grow in its place.

■ Natural blondes typically have more hairs than brunettes, who in turn have more than redheads.

Sources: American Academy of Dermatology and the American Hair Loss Association

"Women are really at a loss," said Eileen Wilson, a 46-year-old woman from Atlanta who began losing her hair at age 40 due to hormonal changes of aging. "You really have to become an expert yourself, and even then a lot of the drugs are expensive and designed for men."

After years of frustrating doctors' appointments, Wilson began chatting online with women across the country who have shared similar stories. In her case, she found a gynecologist who prescribed estrogen supplements, a controversial therapy because of a possible increased risk of breast cancer. But she feels good and her hair is growing back.

Although success rates and side effects vary by patient, there are other treatments for women, Daly said. People with low iron levels or hormone imbalances can take supplements. Certain vitamins, including zinc and calcium, can help, as can waterproof creams that color the scalp.

Like men, women can try minoxidil — better known by the brand name Rogaine — a liquid rubbed on twice a day. Some see good results with certain blood pressure and anti-ulcer drugs that, as side

effects, block testosterone production or build-up in hair follicles. Hair transplants also are possible in women, Daly said, but they tend to be more difficult because doctors have to work with smaller hairs.

Women can help keep their hair healthy by avoiding tight braids and ponytails, weaves and harsh chemical dyes and straighteners, Coker said. However, she said, "Most of the activity that causes thinning happens deep in the scalp. What you do on the surface doesn't matter so much."

So like other doctors, her advice is this: Women bothered by sudden hair loss should go to a doctor to rule out medical causes and, if there are none, talk about Rogaine or other choices. Dermatologists or endocrinologists, doctors who specialize in skin and hormonal issues, are good people to seek out.

Ruth Caton seconds that advice. Since her first appointment with an endocrinologist about a year ago, she has taken synthetic hormones that replace substances her thyroid had stopped producing. Her hair began growing back a couple of months later as her body returned to health.

"Finally," she said, "I can start to style it again." ■



The interracial group Freshlyground draws audiences in both traditionally black venues and traditionally white ones in South Africa. PHOTO BY CRAIG TIMBERG/THE WASHINGTON POST

Freshlyground fuses genres, races

A South African group is earning praise, and drawing attention to racial discord.

BY CRAIG TIMBERG
THE WASHINGTON POST

CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA — Zanele Mazibuko has always hated the violin. And the flute? Forget it. For a child growing up in the black township of Soweto, she said, those instruments represented a distant world of white privilege, beyond a seemingly un-crossable racial divide.

But last week, something began to change her mind. It was a live performance by Freshlyground, one of South Africa's hottest bands, which features both a violin and a flute — not to mention five white members out of seven. The music, a fusion of rock, jazz and Afro-pop, sounded "black," Mazibuko said, delighted and amazed.

"The music they play, it just goes together. How do they manage it?" marveled the trim government worker, 31, who was breathless from dancing. "You expect whites to go this way," she added, stepping to her left, "when we go that way."

The racial mix of Freshlyground would draw little notice in Europe or the United States. But in a South Africa still struggling to unite its fractured population after centuries of rigid discrimination, the band has become a sensation, drawing audiences in both traditionally black venues and traditionally white ones.

After the band finished playing at the private party Mazibuko attended, whites, blacks and coloreds — the term here for mixed-race people who dominate the Cape Town area — lined up for the

members' autographs.

Mazibuko saved her highest praise for Kyla Rose Smith, 23, the petite, brunette violinist who grew up in a white suburb of Johannesburg playing classical music. In many numbers, Smith boogies in tandem African-style steps with lead singer Zolani Mahola, 24, who grew up in a black township near the coastal city of Port Elizabeth.

Mazibuko said of Smith, "Whoever is teaching her to dance is good."

With sales of the band's second album, "Nomvula," topping 100,000 — making it double platinum in South Africa — their success has generated some grumbling.

Bongani Madondo, a music writer for the Sunday Times newspaper, reported last month that black rockers from the townships regarded the new wave of multiracial bands as inauthentic, with the black members no more than "brown sugar grains added to (spunk) up the buttermilk." While praising Mahola's performance, Madondo wrote that she was "still seen as belonging to a white, jazzed-up vaudeville act."

Band members said people's comments to them often reveal unease, or perhaps just unfamiliarity, with the kind of racial mixing displayed in the band's act.

"It's amazing how surprised people are when a white girl can dance, or even half dance," Smith said.

South Africa remains a country where, despite the end of legal segregation in 1994, blacks and whites live mostly separate lives. Cultural expressions — music, dance, theater, books, food, sports, TV programs, churches — continue to be seen as either black or white. Despite some progress, the society remains much as the architects of apartheid, which means "separate" in

Afrikaans, intended.

"We're still so divided," Mahola said. "It's so scary how much people have absorbed, and how much we don't talk about it. I do think that everybody wants to get together, but they don't know how to do it."

At times, music has provided a way. Johnny Clegg, a white singer and guitarist who pioneered multiracial groups and whose music was banned from the radio, became so engrossed in Zulu culture in the 1970s that, backed by a mostly black band, he often appeared on stage dressed as a tribal warrior. During the 1980s and 1990s, the multiracial band Mango Groove was popular with black and white audiences, though performance venues often were segregated.

What's new about Freshlyground is the apparent ease of their collaboration. For the band members in their twenties, apartheid is a matter for the history books, and playing together has never been an intentionally political act.

With Mahola's intimate and often theatrical style on stage, the band seems to be playing music for the fun of it. Occasionally, Freshlyground even plays a frenzied version of Britney Spears' "... Baby One More Time," done in the klezmer style of Jewish pop.

"I love them," said Jenny Kriel, 45, a Cape Town city worker, after another concert here. "They're the new craze in Cape Town."

But more often than not, it is a craze still experienced separately.

In a single day last month, Freshlyground played before a nearly all-white audience in suburban Johannesburg, then, hours later, to a nearly all-black audience nearby in Soweto.

Mixed crowds still happen less often than band members would like. ■

► **GET SERIOUS!** Continued from D1

around his yard with the riding crop. "My estate."

Babble, this is the same old house and yard you've had for years.

"Ah, but my good fellow, these days this is all it takes to make one the master of a wealthy estate."

What's wealthy about — wait a minute. Does this have something to do with the new real estate assessments we just got from the county?

"Spot on, old chap. Up until now, I thought all I had was a small, old, nondescript house that needs a paint job and a new furnace, on a lot that's fairly good sized, though nothing special. But now the county has

informed me that my place is worth a few hundreds of thousands of dollars. Its value's jumped higher than LeBron James. I never thought I'd own anything worth that much money. Didn't you get a property reassessment, too?"

Sure I did. It just made me fret about whether my property taxes are going to jump way up as well.

"That's because you lack imagination. Tell me, my good man, when you were a young man just starting out in the world, did you think you ever own something worth a few hundred grand?"

I suppose not. When I got my first job, the most expensive

thing I owned was a sports jacket. Cost me \$17.95 at Robert Hall.

"Quite so. To me, owning property worth a significant fraction of a million dollars would mean you were a member of the upper crust, the smart set, genteel society, what, ho?"

I don't know about that. And what's with the clothes and the bogus Brit talk?

"That's the only role model I have for being a landed gentleman, the old British guys on those 'Masterpiece Theatre' dramas. What, you think I should talk like Donald Trump?"

Heavens, no. But do you

really mean to act the part of a country squire?

"Why not? Croquet on the lawn, games of whist in the parlor, dressing for dinner, brandy and cigars in the drawing room."

You have a drawing room? "That can be the kitchen. We have those drawings my kid did in art class taped up on the refrigerator. Hey, I'll invite you to the first fox hunt I throw."

Fox hunt? People riding to the hounds? You'll never pull that off.

"OK, I'll settle for a possum hunt. Come on, get with the program. It'll be great fun, ordering the servants about."

You don't have any servants.

"Well, if the county really thinks I'm that rich, it ought to issue me one. What am I paying taxes for, anyway?"

Listen, Babble. You're no more a rich landowner than you were the year before. Property values have risen because of high demand for housing, especially around here, and because people have been building these big \$400,000 and \$500,000 houses. Your lot is big enough for it to be subdivided so a couple of these mini-manions could be built on it, once your smaller house is torn down. But even though this means you're worth more on

paper, if you sold your property, what? You'd have to shell out the same kind of money to buy another home.

"What a killjoy you are. I admit, though, there is one drawback to being a rich landowner country squire."

What's that? "Sooner or later, all those country manor houses wind up in an Agatha Christie murder mystery, with somebody found stabbed to death in the library. I just had my carpet cleaned, and I don't want any bloodstains."

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