

Ask Leyla: Why am I shedding so much hair?



Q: I am a 33-year-old African American woman who opted for a healthier lifestyle several years ago which included no longer using relaxer for my hair. However, since doing so my hair has been shedding consistently and significantly.

I have seen a dermatologist and several “natural” hair professionals without success. What else can I do?

A: First, you are to be commended for choosing to optimize your health and eliminating toxic exposure to powerful hair relaxers. With regard to the hair shedding you complain about, a few possible causes come to mind.

From a nutritional standpoint, micronutrient deficiencies such as low iron can cause hair loss. Even if you don’t have iron deficiency anemia, get your ferritin levels checked. Ferritin is the storage form of iron. Ideally, it should not be below 70 ng/mL. If you’ve embarked on a vegetarian or vegan diet as part of a “healthier lifestyle,” no doubt you will be low in ferritin, as well as other micronutrients such as zinc, carnitine, and B12.

Speaking of ferritin, you need enough reserves to also support your thyroid. Hair shedding will occur if you have undiagnosed hypothyroidism. See your doctor or endocrinologist for a thyroid panel.

Elevated cortisol levels from chronic stress can cause hair shedding as well as thinning of the skin and bones. Are you getting enough sleep? Not getting ample sleep creates physiological stress by impairing regenerative and restorative functions responsible for healthy hair regrowth. A salivary adrenal function test will reveal if your cortisol levels are out of range.

Finally, alopecia areata, an autoimmune condition causing hair shedding and characteristic bald patches may be to blame. Your doctor can check for this via blood tests and refer you to a rheumatologist as appropriate. Being African American, you may be prone to low vitamin D levels which could compromise hair growth and increase risk of autoimmunity. Best to get that checked.

Once you’ve investigated the above conditions, a consultation with a qualified nutritionist can help to maintain your tresses with an appropriate diet and supplementation program.

To your health!

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