

Don't Count On Supplements To Make Your Hair And Nails Grow Faster

There's only one exception to this rule.



Stephanie Pratt, former star of *The Hills*, which wrapped in 2010, has a new venture. Three years ago, the reality TV star moved to the U.K., where she's appeared in reality shows like *Made in Chelsea* and *Celebs Go Dating*. Now, she's launching a line of supplements called To Be Honest by Stephanie.

"It has been nearly a year of research, development, and lots of hard work," Pratt said on her website. "Besides investigating ingredients and products that I am personally interested in, there has been loads of research into what we feel would be the best products for you."

Among the products, Pratt offers supplements for hair and nails. Her site says these pills, which are \$22 for 60 capsules, provide “extra support and care” for and contribute to “the normal maintenance of hair and nails.” The pills join a number of other supplements out there dedicated to boosting hair and nails, although many others actually guarantee to make them grow *faster*.

There's no reliable evidence that supplements can consistently deliver on these promises, with one major caveat. “If you’re deficient in a particular nutrient and start supplementing it, you may notice improved hair and nail health and growth,” New York-based Jessica Cording, R.D., tells SELF. “Generally speaking, though, there’s no guarantee that a supplement will speed up hair and nail growth.”

According to Pratt’s website, the main ingredients in her hair and nails supplement include biotin, zinc, BioPerine, which is “added for its assimilation and thermogenic properties,” bamboo, pea protein, and green tea.

One of these ingredients is definitely key for keeping your appearance in tip-top shape. “Biotin is a required vitamin for hair and nails,” Gary Goldenberg, M.D., medical director of the Dermatology Faculty Practice at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, tells SELF. Many women with thinning hair have low levels of biotin, Gina Keatley, a C.D.N. practicing in New York City, adds. (But, she says, this isn’t the only potential cause of thinning hair, and biotin shouldn’t be a go-to remedy unless blood testing reveals that you have low levels of the vitamin.)

Along with biotin, zinc is another big ingredient associated with hair and nail maintenance and growth, Keatley says. “Zinc is important in many processes involving hair, skin, and nails but should only be used as a supplement if there is a need,” Keatley tells SELF. “Too much zinc can block the absorption of iron and copper, which are essential elements in hair.”

Protein is also essential to hair growth, Beth Warren, R.D.N., founder of Beth Warren Nutrition and author of *Living a Real Life with Real Food*, tells SELF. “However, most Americans are not deficient in protein, and it's not known specifically what 'pea protein' contributes to [hair health],” she says. Bamboo has silica, and if someone is deficient in it, it may help hair growth, Warren says, noting that green tea has vitamins and polyphenols that may contribute to hair softness and help combat hair loss.

All sounds like good stuff, right? But Warren points out one potential problem: Because the supplement industry isn't strictly regulated, these (and any) supplements may not be using ingredients in forms that are easily absorbed. It looks like BioPerine might have been added to help that factor, but Warren explains that there's not much clarity on what the ingredient actually does.

While you can get most of these nutrients from a supplement, Cording says you’re really better off getting them from food. She recommends making sure that you get enough protein, iron, and vitamin C in your diet—the latter of which fights free radical damage and supports collagen production, which is essential for healthy hair and nails. “Getting enough dietary fat is also important for healthy, shiny hair and strong nails, so incorporate healthy sources like nuts, avocado, and omega-3-rich fish like salmon,” Cording says.

Pumpkin seeds and oysters are rich in zinc, and eggs, nuts, and legumes are good sources of biotin, she says—eat healthy foods like these regularly, and you should be covered on the hair and nails front. While you may notice a difference in your hair and nail growth after taking a supplement designed to boost it, it’s likely a sign that you’re not getting enough of those nutrients from food—and that’s really the best way to go.

If you're still itching to make sure you're doing everything possible to take care of your hair and nails, see a dermatologist. Goldenberg recommends many of his patients take a biotin supplement—but that kind of decision should always be made after talking over the reasoning and dosage with your doctor.