

How to Deal With Excessive Hair Shedding in the Fall

BY DONNA FREYDKIN
© SEPTEMBER 15, 2017



You know that feeling, right? You're sudsing up your hair in the shower, you go to rinse it, and as you run your fingers through it...clumps of it cling to your hands. It's one of those panic-inducing moments in which you wonder how much hair loss is normal, whether there's something medically wrong with you, and if someday, you'll wind up with bald patches.

Chances are, you're just fine. In fact, you may just be dealing with seasonal hair loss. It's one of the great ironies of my life that hair grows unabated where I don't want it (like in the nose) but then, drops with abandon from my head, especially when the weather gets colder.

No surprise there, say experts.

"There is evidence that people can note increased shedding in the late fall and winter months. The thought here is that perhaps in the summer months, we hang on to more hair to provide increased protection from the sun. A few months after, when we begin shifting into late fall and early winter, those hairs that we held onto during summer will make a transition into the shed phase. This may result in a temporary increase in shedding compared to your baseline," Emily Wise Shanahan, a Massachusetts-based dermatologist, tells *Allure*.

And yes, *joy of joys*, it may be more noticeable as you get older.

"By 50 years of age, 50 percent of women will experience some degree of hair loss. Hair loss is often seen at any age after pregnancy, surgery or illness. It is also seen in pre- and perimenopausal women, during their early to mid-50s," **Kristina Goldenberg**, a New York-based dermatologist, tells *Allure*.

Some hair loss is par for the course, but when it comes to seasonal loss, you can blame the thermostat. Still, if you do notice you're losing more hair around the cooler months, don't despair, as New York-based dermatologist Jeremy Fenton tells us. Chances are, the hair you lost will be back in the future.

"There has been some research that has shown that there is some seasonality to [shedding]. One study showed that human hair has the highest number of hairs in the telogen phase in July, and a second smaller peak in April. Hairs in the telogen phase generally fall out 100 days later, which means that people would see a shedding at the end of the summer and into the fall. These hairs are not necessarily lost forever, as a healthy hair follicle will then eventually cycle back into its growth phase. The reason for this isn't entirely clear. Some postulate that it is based on evolution, creating more hair in the summer to protect the scalp. Others believe it also is about the body minimizing the shedding during the winter months," says Fenton.

Meaning, your scalp may respond to changes in daylight hours. "We believe that the body is responding in some hormonal manner to the changes in the amount of daylight. The longer daylight hours of the summer trigger the hair to enter the telogen phase, which then triggers the shedding at the end of that phase. The precise mechanism is not clear," says Fenton.



So this brings us to the big question: What, if anything, can you do about it?

"It is always a good idea to make an extra effort in the winter months to keep the hair hydrated and moisturized. Use a deep conditioning mask. Likewise, limiting heat styling can be helpful for the same reasons," Wise Shanahan says.

Kérastase has a whole line devoted to thinning hair, and Harklinikken, which just launched stateside, says it can help deal with hair loss. Peter Thomas Roth makes a killer mask, as does Christophe Robin.

Another way to give your hair a little bit of help as it cools down is to do what your mother has been telling you to do all these years: Take your vitamins. "You can also strengthen the hair that you have by taking supplements.

Biotin is one of the most effective options out there, and it is available over the counter at most drugstores," says Fenton. It may not prevent shedding, but it can prevent breakage and also make the hair you do have actually appear thicker. Another way to prevent breakage of winter hair is to moisturize with a conditioner and avoid too much friction from prolonged wearing of hats."

Mostly, though, a good rule of thumb is paying attention to the part in your hair and noticing if it gets wider. And remember to be kind to your strands during rougher weather. Also: Pay attention to whether your hair is actually shedding or just breaking off. "With winter months comes drier weather and hats rubbing against the hair. Dry, brittle hair is more likely to break and the friction of hats can further contribute to this. Although this is not true hair 'loss,' it can make your hair appear thinner," says Fenton.



If you notice stray locks piling up on your clothes or your pillow, don't panic, says Wise Shanahan. "If you find that you have local bald patches or that your shedding is localized to a specific area such as the frontal hairline or the central part, this may represent a different type of hair loss and should be evaluated by a doctor." Noted.

So here's the takeaway: You can't really mess with Mother Nature.

"There is not much the average person can do to prevent this seasonal shedding. However, if you are somebody who is already concerned about thinning hair, then I would recommend Rogaine (the generic name is minoxidil). This is a topical solution or foam that you can apply to the scalp to help reduce hair loss. One of the proposed mechanisms of minoxidil is that it prolongs the anagen phase of the hair, which is the growth phase. Thus, it may help prevent some of the hairs from entering that telogen phase of summer and ultimately reduce the fall shedding. If you were to use minoxidil, I would recommend using it year-round. Sometimes when you first start using it, it can have some initially shedding effects that are temporary as the hairs adjust their cycle," says Fenton.