

30 Haircare Mistakes That Cause Breakage and Thinning



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IT'S ALWAYS BEEN the goal to obtain healthy, shiny, and [voluminous hair](#). That's why when your strands are breaking, causing an increase in frizz, or worse—suddenly thinning or falling out—it can be really alarming. To

assuage some of the fears that an unexpected hair change can conjure up, we put together a list of haircare mistakes that may be the reason your hair is breaking or thinning (and they're actually not so scary!).

These expert-identified haircare habits range from something as simple as using the wrong hairbrush to using [shampoos](#) that may actually do more harm than good. Understanding your [scalp](#) health is also one of the first (and most important) steps you should be taking when embarking on your hair health journey. Luckily, our experts, including board-certified dermatologists, celebrity hairstylists, trichologists, and more, offer tips for getting started with improving scalp health, as well as for rectifying detrimental hair routines.

Let's break down the 30 mistakes that may be standing between you and your [healthiest hair](#).



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1

Relying on tight hairstyles.

While these hairstyles may make your life easier in the short term, tight braids, ponytails, and buns will actually tug at the hair follicle. This causes permanent scarring and hair loss, double board-certified dermatologist [Tiffany Libby, MD](#), tells [Women's Health](#).



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2

Brushing wet hair.

“Brushing wet hair can increase your risk of breakage, as hair is more fragile and prone to damage when it is wet,” Dr. Libby says to [Women’s Health](#). Instead, brush it when it’s mostly or completely dry to minimize breakage.



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3

Styling with the wrong heat temperature (and not using a heat protectant).

If you use heat often, hairstylist [Bobby Eliot](#) tells [Women's Health](#) readers to never crank a hot tool to the maximum heat setting. The right temperature depends on hair type, texture, and color, so begin with the lowest setting and increase only if necessary. Plus, using [heat protectant](#) is not just a suggestion, it's a rule!



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4

Coloring your hair excessively.

The color process will affect your hair strands. “In order for hair to retain its color, the chemicals in hair dye have to cause some damage,” board-certified dermatologist [Dendy Engelman, MD](#), said to [Women’s Health](#). It’s advised to use “less bleach or less-permanent formulas” to help minimize some of the strain.



Israel Sebastian//Getty Images

5

Using the wrong brush.

“Boar bristle brushes scratch away parts of your hair’s protective layer, weakening strands and increasing porosity,” [Anabel Kingsley](#), consultant trichologist, explains to [Women’s Health](#). Instead, opt for brushes with rounded, flexible plastic prongs. Those with curly hair will benefit from a wide-tooth comb.



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6

Installing protective hairstyles (if not done properly).

In order “for a protective style to be effective, it has to be carefully installed, maintained, and refreshed,” celebrity hairstylist [Annagjid “Kee” Taylor](#) tells [Women’s Health](#). This is because they can pull, causing “hair loss, breakage, painful sores, and scabs.”

It’s advised not to leave in a protective style longer than two months to prevent tangling, dryness, and additional breakage. Limit how much you wear them as well (three or four times a year is about the sweet spot).



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7

Using too much dry shampoo.

We've all relied on dry shampoo a time or two (or for a week, honestly). However, Kingsley [tells us](#) that “dry shampoo is not something you should do for more than a couple of days,” because it’s not a complete substitute for shampooing.

You should also beware of the ingredients. “Look for calming ingredients, like aloe vera or chamomile extract, as well as an antimicrobial agent, like zinc PCA,” Kingsley adds.



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8

Brushing your hair too often.

If you're vigorously brushing your hair, then it's likely that you're causing major breakage. Instead, gently comb through your hair once in the morning and once before bedtime to avoid "creating unwanted tension" that will "literally break and snap your hair off," Eliot says to [Women's Health](#).



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9

Shampooing too much (or too little).

This mistake really depends on your hair type. Dr. Engelman tells [Women's Health](#) that not washing your hair consistently enough “can accrue buildup that eventually inhibits hair growth.” Yet, on the opposite end of the spectrum—washing too often—can strip your hair of its natural oils, leaving it dry and brittle. The only way to know what for sure works for your hair is to experiment with your daily routine!



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10

Investing in unbeneficial hair ties.

Eliot [advises](#) using “silk scrunchies to prevent breakage.” Silk scrunchies will put less stress on your hair when tied back, unlike elastic hair ties, which tend to be fairly tight, especially upon the first few uses.



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11

Treating with chemical relaxers.

Board-certified dermatologist [Dr. Ramya Garlapati](#) tells [Women's Health](#) that chemical relaxers (such as permanent straightening) can damage the hair shaft and alter its chemical composition. In turn, this makes the strands weaker and more susceptible to split ends and breakage.



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12

Not limiting your alcohol and sugary drink intake.

The bad news is that a study [found](#) a correlation (although not equal to causation) between increased [hair shedding](#) and drinking alcohol and sipping on sugary beverages. “Heavy alcohol consumption can contribute to poor absorption of vitamins and nutrients,” [Gary Goldenberg](#), MD, assistant clinical professor of dermatology at Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai Hospital, says to [Women’s Health](#).

The good news is that mocktails are more and more prevalent these days, so low-sugar, non-alcoholic options are commonly available.



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13

Your haircare contains sulfates.

There are so many shampoos and conditioners that contain sulfates. Dr. Garlapati says that the chemical compound “can strip the hair of its natural oils and cause further hair damage.” Therefore, [Tonya Lane](#), a cosmetic chemist, especially advises to [Women’s Health](#) readers that

those with a dry scalp, dry hair, or curly hair to use a sulfate-free shampoo with nourishing ingredients that promote healthy strands.



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14

Over-utilizing protein treatments.

Hairstylist [Mahogany Grace](#) says that using protein treatments too frequently or unnecessarily can actually lead to breakage, oversaturate the hair shaft, and cause a protein overload. This stems from the hair's struggle to absorb moisture, which makes it feel straw-like and brittle.

Always pay attention to the instructions on protein treatments to ensure best results. Check out our expert [deep dive](#) on the topic to truly understand what the treatments are and if you should use them.



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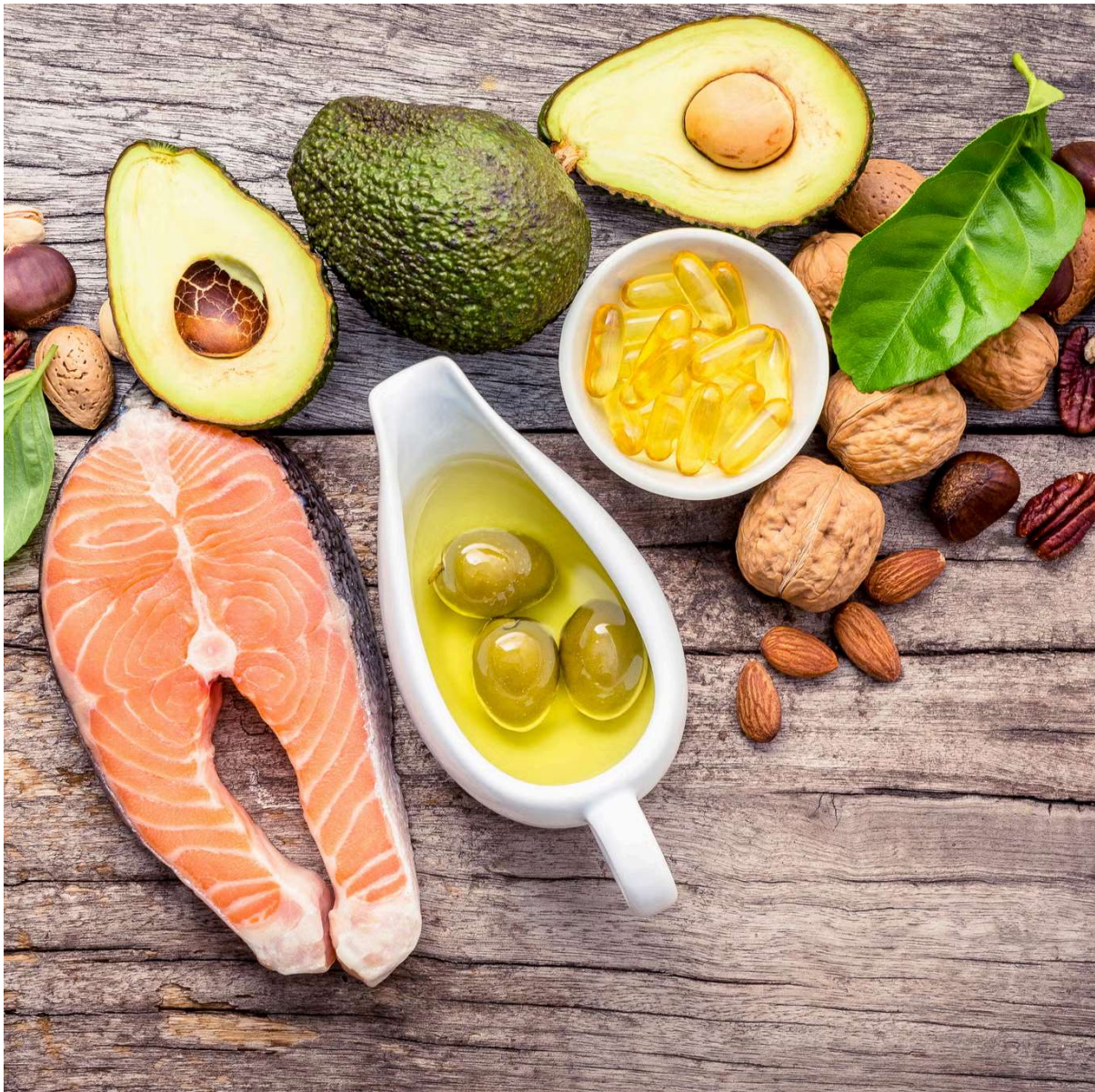
15

Skipping over scalp health.

Scalp health should be your first step to maintaining a healthy haircare regimen. "Ensuring that the hair is not overly-coated with products and keeping a clean scalp will give your hair that needed lift and volume to

promote a fuller look,” hairstylist [Cristian A. Hill](#) explains to [Women’s Health](#).

Additionally, inflammation can weaken the skin barrier, making your scalp more prone to flaking and itchiness, which can damage your hair follicles and disrupt hair growth. One way to keep the scalp clean and free from inflammation is to slowly introduce new hair products into your routine, one at a time.



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You’re not getting the right nutrients.

Just like your body needs nutrients and vitamins, so does your hair. Prioritizing protein, omega-3 fatty acids, vitamin B, iron, and biotin is very important for achieving healthier strands. “These vitamins can give your hair the nutrients it needs to grow healthier and stronger,” dermatologist [Noelani González, MD](#) says to [Women’s Health](#). If your diet is missing out on certain nutrients, then you could also opt for [supplements](#) that promote hair growth.

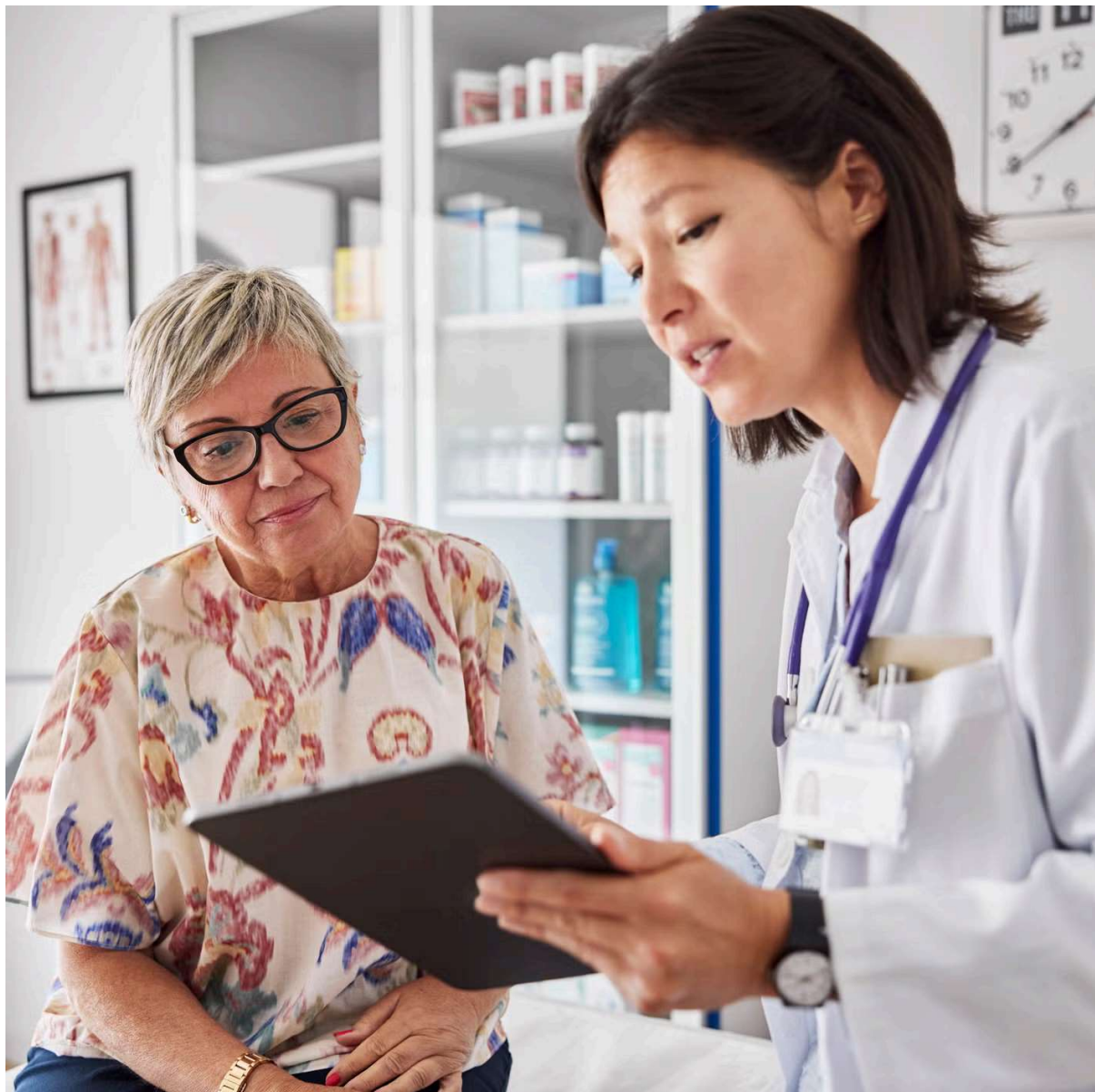


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Managing stress is on the back burner.

If emotional stress is occupying your mind, then it's likely affecting your body, too. Whether you're grieving someone you loved, moving homes, surviving a toxic work environment, or fighting with a friend, all of these circumstances can lead to rapid hair loss and thinning, says [Kristen Lo Sicco, MD](#), associate professor of dermatology at the Ronald O. Perleman Department of Dermatology at NYU Langone Health tells [Women's Health](#).

The first step? Identify the point of stress and attempt to rectify it. Then, incorporate healthy lifestyle habits that may relieve the emotional toll (journaling, meeting up with friends more often, daily walks, therapy, etc.).



Ignoring symptoms that warrant a doctor visit.

Hair breakage and thinning don't always have a quick fix. If you're dealing with significant hair loss, texture changes, etc., paired with other noticeable symptoms (such as sudden weight gain), there may be an underlying reason—like [hypothyroidism](#), [menopause](#), or a vitamin deficiency, [Marina Peredo, MD](#), explains to [Women's Health](#). Getting bloodwork done and having your hormones checked is a beneficial step that will aid your healthy hair journey.



Pulling at your hair.

We've all done it—at a worrisome or stressful time, you start twisting, picking at, or [tugging your hair](#) without even noticing. This habit, identified as [trichotillomania](#), causes hair thinning and irregular patches of short broken hairs, per [Dr. Kseniya Kobets](#). Speaking with a mental health professional can help manage this habit by pinpointing the cause of your anxiety and offering alternative relief tactics.



Skipping over regular trims.

Making a regular appointment with a stylist not only prevents split ends but also discourages them from growing upward and thinning your hair more. Elena Lavagni, director of the hair and beauty salon [Neville](#), advises to [Women's Health](#) readers that seeing a hairdresser every six to eight weeks and making sure thermal scissors are used, because they “help seal the cuticle so the ends are stronger.”



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Olivia is a writer, content creator, and podcast host passionate about food, lifestyle, and shopping with a B.A. in Communications and Political Science. When Olivia isn't typing away or reading Barnes & Noble's latest psychological thriller, she can be found lying on the beach, working up a sweat at a kickboxing class, or sitting on a flight headed to her next travel destination. Her work has been seen in Glamour, Refinery29, Biography, Stylecaster and more.

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