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# Losing too much hair?

If you're worried about that pileup in your brush or shower drain, you're not alone: Thinning hair is an alarming trend among young women. Laurel Naversen Geraghty investigates.

**b**EFORE BRITNEY SPEARS WENT OUT WITHOUT underwear, shaved her head and did the rehab thing, an even bigger shocker had been revealed in a paparazzo photo: She had an honest-to-God bald spot on top of her head. It was every woman's beauty nightmare—thinning hair. And for many, it's a reality: About 43 million U.S. women suffer from hair loss, and experts say it's become pervasive among those in their twenties and thirties.

"Young women are harder on their hair than ever: They're constantly coloring, bleaching, using hot tools and putting in extensions," says Philip Kingsley, a hair health specialist and founder of the Philip Kingsley Trichological Clinics in New York City and London. "They also eat worse, especially if they strive for the skinny-model look, and they're stressed. All of this can lead to breakage or hair loss—and noticeable thinning."

Why the frenzy of overprocessing? Pros point to young Hollywood, the La Lohans of the world and their hair dye-itis. "I have clients coming in every couple of weeks wanting to go from brown to red or blond, like the celebs do," reports Kim Vo, cofounder of B2V salons in Los Angeles. "One woman I just saw had literally no hair at the nape of her neck—it had broken off at the roots because she'd overbleached and overextended it at another salon." Now that at-home color and pro-level styling tools are much more available, continues Vo, "some women keep whamming their hair over and over." Adds celeb stylist Ken Paves, who's also seen the phenomenon, "Hair is fragile! *Everything* has to be done with TLC." Read on for what's normal—and how to remedy what's not.

**SO HOW MUCH HAIR LOSS IS TYPICAL?** Shedding up to 100 strands per day—about the amount that would completely cover a shower drain—is absolutely standard and no beauty threat.

**SIGNS YOUR HAIR IS THINNING (AND WHY)** If your part's widening (check old photos to compare), your ponytail is getting skinnier

Increasing numbers of women see this on their brush.

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or there's much more hair than usual in your brush or drain over the course of a week, your hair's thinning out. In some cases, the cause is female pattern hair loss, which typically shows up in your thirties. (If your mom has this, it doesn't necessarily mean you will, although the more relatives you have with the problem, the more prone you are to it.) But here's some reassuring news: Most kinds of hair loss that young women experience are temporary. They're actually often caused by the very things people do to make their hair look good: chemical relaxing every few weeks, re-dyeing constantly, or abusing hot tools, which can cause hair to break off. But things like weighty extensions—when two or more hairs are attached for every strand of real hair—and tight ponytails or braids worn habitually may cause *permanent* loss, warns Paul J. McAndrews, M.D., a Beverly Hills dermatologist who specializes in hair restoration. "They can yank at the hair and destroy the follicle," he says.

Other common causes of temporary fallout: depression or stress, going on or off the Pill (which messes with your hormones), and having a baby (those pesky hormones again). Bad eating habits can also lead to trouble. "Hair is primarily made of protein, and if you're not getting enough, you won't have good hair growth," says Paradi Mirmirani, M.D., a dermatologist and hair-loss specialist at Kaiser Permanente Vallejo Medical Center in California. Greta Gustafson, 23, a Chicago ad executive, learned this the hard way, living on beer and chips in college. "I was voted Best Hair in high school—it was so thick and shiny," Gustafson says. "But when I was 20, a friend said, 'Wow, your ponytail is tiny—it's like there are two hairs in there!'" A doctor told Gustafson she had severe vitamin deficiencies. "Now I eat everything from the food pyramid—and I get compliments again," she says.

**WHAT CAN HELP** If you're losing more hair than you should, lay off the hot tools (it's summer; set your hair free!) and avoid any chemical process for at least two months. Down a multivitamin with iron, zinc and biotin—all key for hair growth—and get at least five ounces of protein per day (about the amount in a salmon steak). And of course, exercise regularly to help relieve anxiety. Massively shedding? Ask your doc for a referral to a specialist, or find one at the American Academy of Dermatology website, [aad.org](http://aad.org). The expert can pinpoint what's at the root of your hair loss and may recommend over-the-counter minoxidil liquid or foam, or laser therapy to promote growth.

Remember, too, that any thinning is probably a lot less noticeable than you think. Plus, there's always strategic hair placement, such as switching your part (and at least no paparazzo's stalking *your* head). Try not to obsess; in the end, hair isn't a woman's true crowning glory—confidence is. Picture how stunning Melissa Etheridge looked when she sang at the Grammys right after chemotherapy. She was completely bald, but that smile and that pride? *Beautiful.* ©

## Celebs showing scalp

Famous heads with hair issues



Katie Holmes' bangs looked wispy post-Suri. (Totally normal.)



All the hair color changes (and weight loss) may have gone to Nicole Richie's head.

Before going bald, Britney had a bald spot. Too many extensions?