

1. DIET FOR OPTIMIZING THE HEALTH OF YOUR SCALP AND HAIR USING CERTAIN NATURAL FOODS

It is rather obvious that if the body is in good health, this will be reflected in the hair. A well-balanced diet is one of the important factors which help to achieve and maintain a healthy body. The health of your hair very much reflects the adequacy of your diet. You must not underestimate the importance of natural nutrients. There are no rules to your healthy diet, except that you should attempt to eat several of the foods listed here in any given day, and a food from each category at least three times in any one week.

Iron

Iron is a mineral that is very important for the health of hair and it is known that anaemia (associated with low iron levels in the body) is a common cause of diffuse hair loss. Hair sometimes improves when iron intakes are raised, even though the subject does not have anaemia.

Iron sources: liver, kidney, corned beef, beef, herrings, egg, water cress, spring greens and lettuce (young leaves), treacle, cocoa, plain chocolate (poorly absorbed), dried fruit (such as raisins and apricots)

The iron content of a given food is no indication of the degree to which it will be absorbed and utilised. In general, animal sources are much better absorbed than plant sources. Greens must be really green (not white cabbage, for example). Generally, greens grown in the UK are poor sources of iron. Iron deficiency, with or without associated anaemia, has been reported in about 70 per cent of women with diffuse alopecia.

Zinc

Zinc deficiency has not only been associated with hair loss but also with various hair shaft defects. There is an hereditary form of zinc deficiency which is sometimes not diagnosed until well into adult life and there appears to be a link with reduced absorption of unsaturated fatty acids.

Zinc sources: whole grains, corn on the cob, oysters, maple syrup (genuine), beef, peas, liver, egg yolk

Zinc is clearly established as one of the nutrients required for optimum wound healing, so it may safely be regarded as essential to the health of skin, including the scalp. Zinc deficiency is as likely to be due to malabsorption as from dietary deficiency.

Vitamin A

Vitamin A is important for the integrity of epithelial tissues such as the skin of the scalp. Natural Vitamin A occurs in animal foods, and plants provide the provitamin carotene which is less biologically effective.

Vitamin A sources: apricots (dried), peaches, spinach, liver, beef, lamb, carrots, broccoli, chicken, pork

Zinc and Vitamin A appear to work together and deficiencies of either are associated with dry, breaking hair. Vitamin E appears to assist the absorption of Vitamin A.

Fatty acids and Vitamin E

Many of the skin changes originally attributed to Vitamin A deficiency have now been shown to be a deficiency of essential fatty acids. Vitamin E is equally important for epithelial tissues, such as scalp skin, but serves as an antioxidant of both Vitamin A and polyunsaturated fatty acids. It seems sensible, therefore, to consider both together.

Fatty acid sources: mayonnaise, corn oil, soybean oil, polyunsaturated margarine, chicken (leg meat)

Vitamin E sources: mayonnaise, margarine (made with corn oil), butter (not a very rich source), wholemeal cereals, broccoli

The fat sources above have been carefully selected to provide a wide and balanced spectrum of fatty acids. Small amounts are quite satisfactory. Soybean oil can be provided by appropriate tinned fish (eg, tuna in soya oil). Regular intake is more important than quantity in this instance.

Tyrosine and methionine

Cysteine and methionine are the principal sources of sulphur in the diet and are absolutely essential for the maintenance of hair structure. Tyrosine is the starting point for synthesis of the hair pigments and is necessary for the synthesis of the hormone thyroxine, which is important for maintaining health of the hair.

Cysteine and methionine sources: eggs, milk, beef

Phenylalanine and tyrosine sources: eggs, milk, beef

Note: The body can make cysteine from methionine and tyrosine from phenylalanine. Amounts are not generally high even in these proteins, and many proteins simply do not contain either methionine or tyrosine. Eggs are the best of the above sources. This is one instance where it is advisable to use supplements – of methionine and of L-tyrosine, both now readily available in capsule form from health food outlets.

Warning

You must not take tyrosine supplements if taking mono-amine oxidase inhibitors such as Manerix, Marplan Parnate or Partelin. If in doubt, consult your doctor.

Biotin

A number of types of biotin deficiency have been identified, most of which are hereditary, including one of late onset deficiency. In such instances the problem is one of utilisation, but this can be improved by raising the intake. A diffuse, sparse type of alopecia has been linked to biotin deficiency. Seborrhoeic dermatitis has definitely been linked to biotin deficiency in infants.

Biotin sources: liver, pulses, kidney, nuts, egg yolk, cauliflower, yeast and yeast extracts (eg, Marmite)

Although it is doubtful whether this vitamin needs to be normally provided in the diet, there certainly is a case for this in certain individuals.

While we have identified certain vitamins, minerals and other dietary factors of particular importance for the health of hair, together with the food sources which provide them, there is still a need to maintain your intake of other vitamins such as Vitamin C and the Vitamin B complex group.

In many instances, one particular food item will provide several other dietary factors in addition to the one under which it is listed. Food freshness, together with the type and duration of cooking, can also be important factors in maintaining the vitamin content of foods.

Do not let an obsession with certain dietary factors distract you from ensuring a well-balanced diet. The secret of good nutrition is variety and diversity of foods eaten.

Warning

It is extremely dangerous for anyone on a course of MAOI-type antidepressant medication to eat foods particularly rich in either tyramine (the amine) or tyrosine (the corresponding amino acid). Similarly, these foods should be avoided by anyone under treatment for hypertension (high blood pressure). If in doubt, your doctor or pharmacist will advise.

2. NATURAL SOURCES OF ESSENTIAL VITAMINS

As mentioned in the first section of this leaflet, there are no rules except that you should attempt to eat several of the foods listed here in any given day, and a food from each category at least three times in any one week.

Each food listed in the tables is a rich source of at least one vitamin, although there may be instances where one of the foods mentioned in a particular category is not as rich a source of that particular vitamin as we would have liked. Such foods are included to provide adequate variety and choice. Variety is the key to dietary success.

VITAMIN	COMMENT ON WHOLE GROUP
Vitamin A (non-carotene sources) Pig, sheep or ox liver; fortified margarine; eggs; herring; salmon; butter; cheese (high fat)	Fairly stable during cooking
Vitamin D Kippers; tuna (canned); sardines and pilchards (canned); fortified margarine; eggs; butter	Fairly stable during cooking
Vitamin C Brussel sprouts; broccoli tops; oranges; grapefruit; tomatoes; green peppers; mustard; cress; water cress; parsley; cabbage; cauliflower; spinach; strawberries; blackcurrants; raspberries; blackberries	Losses inevitable during cooking and storage Avoid copper utensils and soda
Vitamin B1 Pork; beef; peas and other legumes; all green vegetables; eggs (whole); fish (content variable); mutton (though less than in pork or beef)	Leaches out in cooking water Destroyed by alkalis such as bicarbonate during cooking
Vitamin B2 Spinach; beans; cheese; liver; kidney; enriched breakfast cereal; eggs; pork; beef; mutton (lean); Marmite; Bovril	Fairly stable during cooking Destroyed by alkalis such as bicarbonate during cooking
Nicotinic Acid Beef; pork; fish; maizeflour; cornflour; cheese; broccoli; tomatoes	Usually stable during cooking
Vitamin B5 Pork; beef; potatoes; peas; eggs	Usually stable during cooking Losses occur when frozen meat is thawed out
Vitamin B6 Salmon; eggs; spinach; bananas; liver; potatoes (content varies)	Destroyed by alkalis such as bicarbonate during cooking
Pantothenic Acid Beef; pork; sea fish; beans; eggs; potatoes; peas; orange juice	Easily destroyed by heat

Special Instances (because of rare distribution and/or low content)

VITAMIN	COMMENT ON WHOLE GROUP
Folic Acid Ox kidney; eggs; cabbage; lettuce; asparagus; beef; pork; spinach; broccoli tops; beets	Food preparation can cause serious losses
Vitamin B12 Ox liver; ox kidney; pig heart; herrings; egg yolk	Usually stable during cooking
Biotin Chicken; pork; lamb; beef; polished rice; eggs; sea fish (variable)	Usually stable during cooking

You will note that milk is not mentioned at all. This is because it is, frankly, a greatly overrated food which contains far too much saturated fat and a lot of water. Milk rarely contains anything like the vitamin levels sometimes suggested.

Potatoes are mentioned only when the absence of better sources makes them of importance. Vitamin contents vary greatly with variety, season, storage and cooking methods.