LYNDA'S SON REVEALS HEARTACHE

MUM COULD HAVE BEEN SAVED

Star's cancer missed for 18 months because she was not given simple test
What does your hair say about your health?

If you’re having more bad hair days than good, it could be something more serious.

By Natasha Holt

With autumn bedding in, our hair is often the first thing to suffer the effects of the cold weather and central heating. But if you’re worrying about more than a bit of frizz, it could be a sign of something more sinister.

“Hair is a great marker for health and very often shows the first signs of a medical disorder,” says Sara Gilmore, a trichologist in Harley Street. So if you notice any of these problems with your locks, it could be time to see your GP.

**Dry brittle hair**

Over-use of straighteners and other heated tools will obviously affect the quality of your mane. However very weak, damaged hair and/or excessive hair shedding can also be a sign of dehydration.

Most people don’t drink enough water so ensure you drink at least two or three litres of fluid a day and avoid alcohol, tannins, sugar and caffeine,” advises Sara from the Hair Today, More Tomorrow clinic.

Extremely brittle hair and hair loss can also be symptoms of thyroid problem. So if these are persistent see your GP or a trichologist, who will refer you for tests. “It’s worth noting that your hair can be affected from only a mild imbalance to the thyroid,” adds Sara. “Mild imbalances can revert back to normal if you avoid stress and eat healthily.”

**HAIR CARE:** Take a daily supplement rich in vitamin D, minerals, Omega 3 and copper.

**Dandruff/scaly scalp**

“Dandruff or flaky scalp is very common and affects around 98% of the population,” says Dr Adam Friedmann, a consultant dermatologist at The Harley Street Dermatology Clinic.

“However, severe dandruff can indicate a weakened immune system.”

Make sure you are getting enough rest and avoid stress where possible. Other conditions such as seborrhoeic dermatitis, psoriasis and eczema can also cause the problem but these will affect other parts of the body too.

**HAIR CARE:** Dr Friedmann says, “Wash your hair with a medicated dandruff shampoo containing salicylic acid, which removes the skin cells, coal tar, which has a natural anti-fungal agent, or a tea-tree oil.

“A steroid scalp application can also be used to reduce the inflammation and itching but avoid continual use.” See a dermatologist or your GP if the condition is severe.

**Thinning hair**

“This occurs in around 30% of women going through the menopause,” says Dr Asim Shama. Shama, head of the Crown Clinic in Manchester.

“The changes in a woman’s body lead to hormonal imbalances, which result in hair loss.”

The good news is that for 50% of women this problem can be rectified by taking hormone replacement therapy (HRT). But the doctor adds: “Unfortunately, hair lost during the menopause does not grow back in women for whom HRT was not effective. The only permanent treatment is a hair transplant.”

**HAIR CARE:** You notice hair falling thinner hair alongside other menopausal symptoms, speak to a GP about HRT.

**Premature greying**

Defined as greying in your 20s, this is mostly down to genetics. But stress, nutritional and hormonal factors can also influence hair colour.

“Stress uses up the body’s vitamin B, which will have an affect on your hair,” says Sara Gilmore. In rare cases certain diseases such as diabetes and thyroid problems can also cause premature greying.

“Generally speaking, going grey is only premature if you notice it at an earlier age than others in your family,” adds Sara.

“See your GP if you experience excessive thirst or extreme fatigue. Otherwise see a qualified trichologist.”

**HAIR CARE:** Take a vitamin B supplement if you are under stress. Avoid smoking and alcohol.

**Shorter layers on top**

Have you noticed that you have shorter layers on top caused by breakages in new hairs growing through? If so, it’s likely you don’t have enough protein in your diet.

“This weakens the hair and leaves it less resistant to heat and chemicals,” explains Sara.

Your hair will need some serious TLC to recover. So eat well and avoid over-processing it, ensuring you use heat protection products before styling. Sugary foods can affect absorption of protein so steer away from sweets too.

**HAIR CARE:** Eat a palm-sized portion of protein at each meal.

**Bald spots along the hairline**

If you’re a fan of the “Croydon facelift” you may be suffering from traction alopecia, where the follicles have been permanently damaged by pulling hair too tightly. This is a fairly common problem, particularly among women of Afro-Caribbean origin,” says Dr Shama.

“Causes include wearing your hair in a tight ponytail, braids or cornrows, dreadlocks, hair weaves or wigs attached with glue - even wearing a turban incorrectly. And it doesn’t affect women. Calum Best, a hair transplant surgeon, damaged his hair permanently by wearing it tightly pulled back in his early 20s.”

**HAIR CARE:** If you spot the signs early enough and stop whatever is causing it the hair should repair itself.

**Receding hair**

“This doesn’t just happen to older men and, says Dr Shama, can be caused by a lack of diet nutrients.”

“Hair can react as a result of crash diets,” he says. “If you cut corners it will be reflected in your hair. It will look lackluster, fall out and reflect your overall ill health.”

However, receding hair is also common among women with Polycystic Ovary Syndrome. “Women with PCOS can develop facial hair and new hair on their arms, chest and buttocks, yet recele on the scalp,” says Dr Shama.

**HAIR CARE:** If you experience any other PCOS symptoms such as irregular periods or weight gain, ask your GP to investigate. Sticking to a well-balanced diet should solve the problem otherwise.