

ARE YOU HEALTHY? TEST YOUR HAIR

Your hair can reveal your nutritional deficiencies, stress level, and more.

Your hair's color, length, and style speak volumes about your personality. But did you know that analyzing your tresses may provide clues about your health and well-being? Here's how the experts get to the root of what ails you.

HAIR MINERAL ANALYSIS

What it can detect: Your body's levels and ratios of calcium, magnesium, sodium, potassium, and other minerals; problems in your thyroid (which regulates your metabolism); blood-sugar balance (such as whether you're at risk for diabetes); levels of copper (too little can lead to heart disease, too much to weight gain, PMS, and migraine headaches); and immune function.

Procedure: Performed mostly by nutritionists, this involves removing about 200 strands of hair from several areas on the back of your head, where it is unnoticeable. The first inch of hair is examined at a laboratory for mineral content. Esther Blum, a Manhattan nutritionist, says this analysis can reveal two to three months' worth of information, whereas a blood test shows only what is going on at the time blood is drawn.

Before you get the test, know that several doctors question its validity and claim that results for the same batch of hair can vary from lab to lab. "I don't believe you can take a dead piece of protein and determine anything about the current status of your health," says Steven Victor, M.D., a New York dermatologist. Blum argues that the bad press stems from those who incorrectly test the ends of hair, which are too old to reveal present conditions, and that many doctors simply don't know much about this alternative type of analysis. "I know the test works because I continually see my patients benefit from the results," she says. "People who suddenly gain weight for no apparent reason will have the test done and discover that they have a particular imbalance, and I'm able to treat them successfully. I have yet to see a case where the results of mineral analysis did not reflect the patient's initial complaints."

Treatment: Diet counseling and supplements.

Where to go: Esther Blum (212-614-2339); initial consultation, \$135, mineral analysis, \$160, and follow-up, \$65. Other nutritionists: Diana Zelvin, New York City (212-352-3523); Linda Lizotte, East Windsor, Connecticut (800-847-8302); Robert Crayhon, Boulder, Colorado (303-415-0229).

TRICHOLOGY VISIT

What it can detect: Causes of hair loss.

Procedure: Trichologists (experts who specialize in hair loss and scalp problems) examine your medical history and present lifestyle to pinpoint the reason for your condition.

Treatment: The course of action is determined on a case-by-case basis, but David H. Kingsley, Ph.D., a New York trichologist, corrects hair loss by getting your whole body back in sync. Eighty percent of hair loss in women is due to controllable factors. "The main culprit is stress," says Kingsley. "A stressful life leads to other hair-loss contributors, such as poor eating habits and imbalances in hormones." He may offer nutrition counseling (hair loss often signals iron and protein deficiencies), recommend a blood test, or advise switching your type of hormone replacement therapy or birth control pill to balance out hormones.

Where to go: David H. Kingsley (866-980-4700); \$150-\$250 for consultation, products, and treatments. For other trichologists, go to hairscentists.org, or click on the International Association of Trichologists link at virtualhaircare.com.au.

MICRO HAIR ANALYSIS

What it can detect: Some vitamin and mineral deficiencies, plus dandruff, dry or oily scalp, and thinning hair.

Procedure: A technician runs a small magnifying tool along your scalp to check for redness, flaking, and oiliness. Next, a few hairs are removed and viewed underneath a microscope to determine the health of your root and hair shaft. Everything takes place in a salon, as opposed to a doctor's office or lab.

Treatment: Technicians may suggest supplements formulated to correct dry or damaged hair, oily scalp, and hair loss. Additionally, the salon will offer topical treatments and take-home products to improve your hair.

Where to go: J.F. Lazartigue Hair Spa and Treatment Center, New York City (212-288-2250); \$150. Participating René Furterer-affiliated salons (800-522-8285); \$35-\$60. Regenix, Los Angeles (800-908-8885); \$200 and up. **Victoria Kirby**