

Pros and cons of a new chemical treatment to straighten hair

March 25 2011, By Angela Koenig,

There was a time when it was common practice for women to stand over the ironing board to straighten their hair, which goes to say that some women will do whatever it takes to get rid of unwanted curls or frizz.

Little wonder then that the pros and cons of a new chemical [hair](#) treatment promising smooth locks for up to two months or more are making cosmetic headlines.

The process involves applying a mix of keratin—a natural protein found in the hair, skin and nails—and chemical additives (such as formaldehyde) to freshly washed hair. The hair is then blown dry and straightened with a flat iron.

According to an article in the [Wall Street Journal](#), the process can cost as much as \$600 in some salons.

Although women do not normally consult a physician before considering this or any other hair treatment, UC Health dermatologist Emily Moosbrugger, MD, advises a consult with a dermatologist for women who have pre-existing hair and scalp conditions.

"For the most part, hair is in a constant cycling phase," she says. "You have a growing phase, a resting phase and a shedding phase, and even if hair is pulled out it can usually cycle back to a growing phase. But some people have pre-existing scalp issues and susceptibility to damage or loss."

There are also the long-term effects of chemical applications—especially if not applied by a licensed professional, she says.

"In the most severe cases, people who have had chronic cumulative damage from straightening or chemical processing over the years can have irreversible hair loss. Those are exceptions and rare, but it does happen."

Moosbrugger is also not a fan of the flat iron because it involves excessive pulling on the hair, which can lead to damage to the hair and the hair follicle, which can lead to alopecia (hair loss).

Because cosmetic fads come and go, Moosbrugger suggests the common-sense approach apply: "The only reason that I would recommend someone avoid the keratin straightening treatment would be to avoid potential damage to your hair, the same as with any other [chemical](#) treatment or straightening product."

Provided by University of Cincinnati

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