

Styling practices can lead to serious hair and scalp diseases for African-Americans

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Styling practices can lead to serious hair and scalp diseases for some African Americans, says Henry Ford Hospital dermatologist Diane Jackson-Richards, M.D.

"[Hair](#) is an extremely important aspect of an African-American woman's appearance," says Dr. Jackson-Richards, director of Henry Ford's Multicultural Dermatology Clinic. "Yet, many women who have a hair or scalp disease do not feel their physician takes them seriously. Physicians should become more familiar with the culturally accepted treatments for these diseases."

Dr. Jackson-Richards says proper hair care can help prevent the onset of such diseases like seborrheic dermatitis and alopecia, and that dermatologists need to become more sensitive to the hair and scalp plights of African Americans.

Dr. Jackson-Richards will discuss these issues Monday during a presentation of "Hair Disease and the African-American Patient" at the annual American Academy of Dermatology conference in San Diego.

Little research has been done about the prevalence and causes of hair and scalp diseases in African Americans. Dr. Jackson-Richards says understanding the unique physiologic characteristics of African textured hair – for example, it grows slower and has a lower hair density than other ethnic groups – will assist dermatologists in prescribing treatment options.

African-American women are known to shampoo their hair less frequently than other ethnic groups, and an estimated 80 percent of them use chemical relaxers. Frequent use of blow dryers and hot combs, combined with popular hair styles like hair weaves, braids and dreadlocks, add physical stress to the hair and contribute to scalp diseases like alopecia, or hair loss.

"Hair loss is the fifth most common condition cited by patients when they visit their dermatologist," Dr. Jackson-Richards says.

Dr. Jackson-Richards suggests these grooming tips for patients to reduce their risk of developing a hair or scalp disease:

- Wash hair weekly with a moisturizing shampoo and conditioner.
- Allow two weeks between relaxing and coloring.
- Limit use of blow dryers and hot combs and other heated hair styling products to once a week.
- Wash braids or dreadlocks every two weeks.
- Avoid wearing braids too tightly; don't wear longer than three months.
- To detangle hair, use a wide tooth comb while conditioner is still in the hair.
- Use natural hair oils with jojoba, olive, shea or coconut oils.

Provided by Henry Ford Health System

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