



Faking it

Want to flirt with a brand new look and thinking of having hair extensions? *Cosmo Hair & Beauty* takes you through the pros and cons. By Emily Brace

How many of us would turn down the chance to have the hair of our dreams in a matter of hours? As countless celebrities use hair extensions to achieve longer, thicker locks, it seems we, too, are embracing the ease of extensions. But what's the real story when it comes to the time, money and effort involved?

The consultation

This is usually free or carries a small charge redeemable against the price of having extensions. It's the moment to discuss all your concerns and exactly what you want to achieve, whether it's length, volume, or just the addition of a few flashes of colour to liven up your locks. The stylist will check the condition of your hair and advise what's best for you. Be aware, though, that your hair needs to be at least three inches long before the hairdresser can attach the extensions.

Real v synthetic

Extensions can be made using human or synthetic hair – some salons offer both while others specialise in one type. Whether you go for real or fake, there's a huge choice of textures and colours available to match to your own hair. But before you decide, consider the pros and cons.

Real-hair pros

- ★ Real hair will move and feel like your own, and extensions don't get more natural than when you use the real thing.
- ★ You can use heated appliances, such as curling tongs or straighteners, on your extensions.
- ★ While it's true that most real-hair extensions take longer to apply than synthetic extensions, there is one exception. Great Lengths, a human-hair extension company, have developed a new air pressure Fast Fusion system that allows stylists to apply a whole head of real-hair extensions in an hour. A special transfer sheet allows 10 strands in a row to be attached at once rather than the usual strand-by-strand application. Call 0870 241 4671 for more information.

★ Raccoon, Connect and Great Lengths are well-known real-hair extension companies that source high-quality hair for extensions. They're also a hit with celebrities – Angelina Jolie wore Raccoon extensions for her role as Lara Croft, while both Victoria Beckham and Martine McCutcheon are fans of Connect; Great Lengths extensions are popular with Jennifer Aniston and J-Lo. American dream is a new company offering high-

quality real hair and a wide range of quality synthetic extensions, as does Raccoon.

Real-hair cons

- ★ Real hair doesn't come cheap, especially European hair, which is quite rare and very sought after. Expect to pay around £600 or more for a full head of extensions.
- ★ It can take up to eight hours to attach a full head of real-hair extensions, so make sure that patience is one of your virtues.
- ★ Quality varies. While European hair is of a very high quality, hair from the Far East is more likely to have been chemically processed – what was once black, straight hair might now be blonde and curly. Over-processing, especially with blonde and red shades, can leave hair dull and coarse. But on the upside, Far Eastern hair can still look great and is less expensive!
- ★ Real-hair extensions need to be removed in the salon using a special solvent, which can sometimes irritate sensitive scalps.

Synthetic-hair pros

- ★ If you don't like the thought of second-hand hair, good-quality, monofibre hair is the next best thing. This type of hair can look so natural that most people will think it's all your own!
- ★ Synthetic hair is quite light reflective and can look super glossy, giving you extra wow!
- ★ Don't get weighed down by your extensions – fibre extensions are roughly half the weight of real-hair extensions. They're also non-porous and don't absorb water when wet. This makes them ideal for

people who have very fine hair.

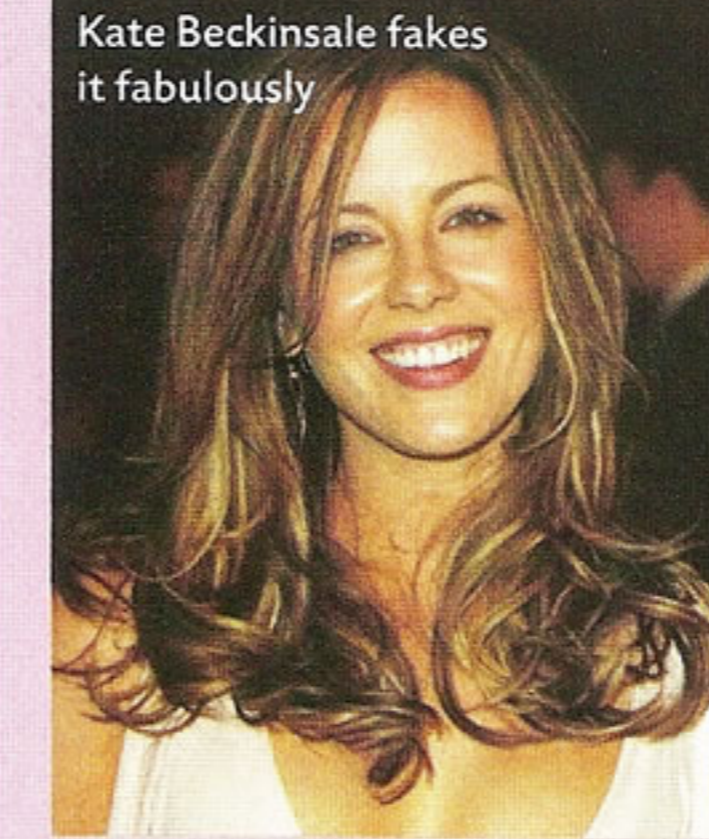
- ★ They're less of a headache for your bank manager – a full head of synthetic extensions will set you back up to £400.
- ★ They take less time to attach – four-six hours for the full works is about standard.
- ★ Good synthetic hair extensions include Dome, used by Kate Beckinsale and Natalie Imbruglia, and ProHair, worn by the Liberty X girls and Sadie Frost.

Synthetic-hair cons

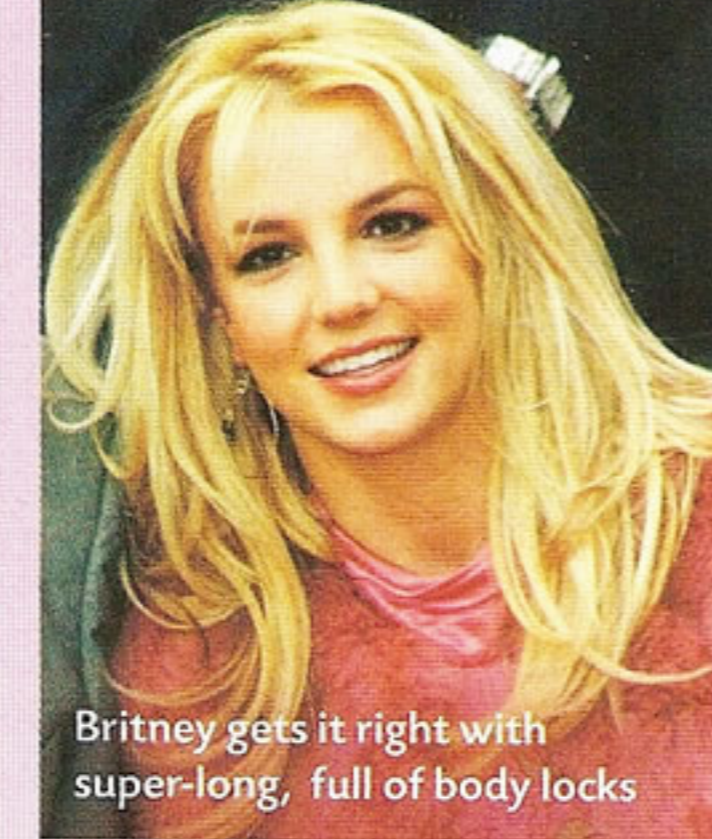
- ★ Unfortunately, you'll have to part with your curling tongs and straighteners, as you can't use bare-metal appliances on fibre hair. You can use hot rollers to create curls and blow-dry as normal to straighten, but it's best to keep direct heat away from the bonding area. Ideally, dry the root area first with a cool setting, then continue.

EXTENSION GRANTED!

Four top celebrities show how to wear it well...



Kate Beckinsale fakes it fabulously



Britney gets it right with super-long, full of body locks



Denise goes for length and volume... and it works!



Beyoncé shows us how to do extensions, A-list style

Shortcuts to long hair

Human hair grows about 1cm per month, which means if you want really long hair, you're talking a five-year wait. Extensions, however, can give you 60cm of hair within hours! It takes up to 300 extensions to transform a short style, which explains why they're pricey – you're paying for the hair and your technician's time and expertise. Emma Bunton and Beyoncé do long extensions with style, but avoid disaster locks à la Jordan and Jennifer Ellison – sometimes less is definitely more!

Turn up the volume

If you're not after Mrs Beckham's long locks but want to add some oomph to your current crop, consider adding some volumising extensions. "They're a popular choice for people who've found the right cut but need some more body," says Feleny Georgiou, >

founder and director of Connect hair systems, who boosted Denise Van Outen's bob. Raccoon session stylist Michael Cimino loves the volumising effects. "With a full head of extensions, you're doubling the amount of hair that's already there, so you can imagine how luscious and thick that will be," he says.

Colour cheats

"Extensions are matched to your hair, but block colour is never used as this looks unnatural," says Debbie Zoltie of Great Lengths. "Your own hair is multi-tonal so we always use a mix of shades." You don't have to have a full head of extensions to brighten up your hair colour, though – adding a few highlights will do. A cheap and quick way of jazzing up your style is to try colour enhancers. Prolin enhancers from Dome, loved by models Kate Moss and Elle Macpherson, are a range of 24 natural shades and eight hot fashion shades, which last for six-eight weeks. Application takes no more than half an hour in the salon and they cost from £30. We love their sunkissed shades – try highlights in Sunshine Blonde, Highlighted Blonde and Pearl for colour without chemicals, and a subtle volume boost, too!

Photography: © Madame Figaro/Frédéric Farré. Celebrity pictures: Bigpicturephoto.com; Rex Features

CELEB DON'TS – HOW NOT TO DO IT:

They may have access to top stylists, but sometimes even celebrities get it wrong



Jordan fakes it again with these obvious extensions



Dannii's extensions look more wiggly than wow



Nicole Richie proves money can't always buy top locks

Need-to-know facts

Bonding basics

There are several different systems available, from heat-sealing to glue and cold fusion. The extensions are attached in neat, horizontal rows a quarter of an inch from the scalp, leaving the natural hairline untouched to disguise the bonds. Your natural hair should be undamaged, cocooned inside the hair extension and left to grow as normal.

Maintenance check

There's no doubt about it, your own hair is a lot easier to look after! It takes time and effort to keep extensions looking beautiful. They last three months before they need to be replaced, and you'll need to visit the salon every four-six weeks so bonds can be checked over and replaced if necessary. Caring for your extensions involves gentle daily combing and separating the bonds to avoid matting and tangling. And it's also a good idea to sleep with your hair tied up. Celebrity hairdresser Errol Douglas, who has extended

the locks of Jenny Frost and Emilia Fox, says: "Always ask your hairdresser or technician about the correct aftercare regime. With real-hair extensions, avoid oil-based products as they can make the extensions fall out. With monofibre hair you need conditioning products to keep it looking smooth." Some brands have their own specialist range of after-care, such as American Dream, Great Lengths and ProStyles. For fibre hair we love ProHair Daily Conditioning Spray, £4.25, which keeps your extensions lustrous and shiny.

Removal

"It is crucial that your hair extensions are removed by a professional, preferably by the person who applied them," says Errol Douglas. Expect to be in the salon for an hour or more depending on how many you've had put in. Real-hair extension bonds are removed using a removal gel or solution, which breaks up the bond and allows the extension to slide off. You may have a bit of residue

from the bonding agent left on your hair, but this is easily removed with a deep conditioning treatment. Fibre-hair bonds can be simply snapped off without the use of a solvent.

Damage report

When extensions are put in, they shouldn't cause pain. "If it hurts, then your technician is creating a connection with too much tension," explains Mark Sharp, creative director at extension specialists Mark Glenn. "Always say if you're in pain so they can adjust the tension accordingly." For the first few days, your extensions may seem a bit tight, but they should settle down within a week. If they're causing you discomfort beyond a week, have them checked. "Lots of long or heavy extensions add additional pressure to your scalp, which can cause headaches or thinning of your natural hair," warns Mark Hill, British Hairdresser of the Year. In the most extreme cases, you could get traction alopecia – hair loss caused by the constant tension and pulling from extensions or from the tugging involved in removal. If you're suffering or have suffered from hair loss, see an expert before getting extensions. Mark Glenn Hair Enhancement specialises in hair loss and uses The Kinsey System, where a fine mesh is placed over the affected area and micro-fine individual connections are attached to both the mesh and natural hair. It allows the scalp to breathe and the hair to grow unhindered. For information, visit www.markglenn.com or call 020 7495 6969. >