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Nancy Dell'Olio's complexion's perfection – but she's having a hair horror

Kate Beckinsale looks pale and tired from the front – and not much better from the back

WHY IS OUR HAIR FALLING OUT?

It's not just busy celebs like Victoria Beckham, Nancy Dell'Olio and Kate Beckinsale who are suffering from thinning hair and bald spots. More and more of us are starting to lose our lovely tresses – and our 'toxic' lifestyles could be to blame

Ever seen one strand of hair too many heading down the plughole, gasped and thought, 'Is that normal?' From recent pictures in the papers, it seems Nancy Dell'Olio, Kate Beckinsale and Victoria Beckham have. The three stars have been spotted out and about with thinning patches and, in Kate Beckinsale's case, even an actual bald spot. Famous or not, the idea that you could be going bald is terrifying for any woman. But the plain fact is, six in ten women will suffer some kind of hair loss in their lifetime, and that figure seems to be on the rise. 'I've been in this business for almost 30 years and have noticed

a significant surge in the number of women seeking help for thinning hair in the last three,' says hair and scalp expert Peter Bannister. He blames much of this rise on stress, bad diet and our 'toxic' modern lifestyles. We take a closer look...

Toxic cause: STRESS

Hair grows in cycles and it's normal to lose up to 100 hairs a day. Stress, though, can disrupt that cycle and 'shock' your hair into temporarily falling out much faster – a condition called telogen effluvium. According to Dr Michael Isaac, a consultant psychiatrist

at King's College London, some people are more susceptible to this particular problem than others. 'We're all born with a different genetic make up,' he explains. 'This means we all react differently to traumatic events or lifestyle problems such as stress, poor diet, relationship troubles or lack of sleep. For that reason, some women will temporarily lose their hair after an emotional shock – but the good news is it should start to grow back eventually.' If it doesn't, you should see your GP for advice. **How to detoxify** Taking time out to relax is vital for hair health. 'Obviously it's very difficult to avoid stress completely but making sure you

wearing thin

wearing thin

do plenty of things you really enjoy helps,' says Liz Tucker, wellbeing consultant at health spa Champneys. 'Set realistic goals, building on your strengths and being honest with yourself about what you can achieve. Yoga, meditation or walking are all great activities that help to make you feel relaxed, so try to schedule them in when you can.' Improving your time management skills can also help, so, if possible, prioritise what you're doing and work out which tasks you can offload on to someone else – be that a colleague or your man!

Toxic cause: BAD DIET

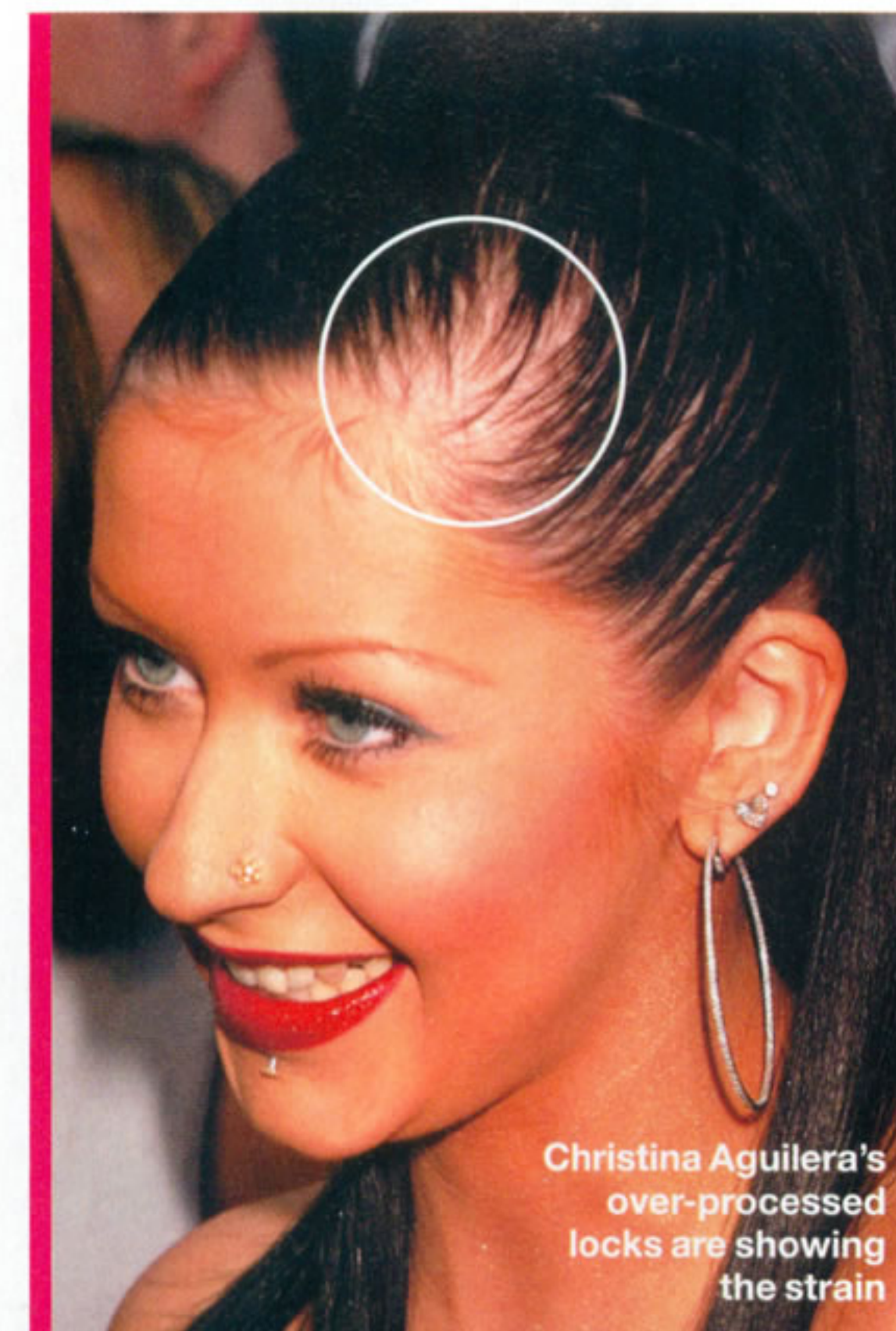
Peter Bannister points to a poor diet and too much alcohol as the chief culprits for 'toxic scalp syndrome' – the term he's coined for a congested scalp which can weaken your follicles, leading to hair loss. Lack of iron can also make hair fall out and if you're not getting enough essential nutrients your immune system can suffer, which is another reason why you might see more hair than you'd like on your pillow in the morning.

How to detoxify Give your body the best chance possible to eliminate toxins by trying to stick to a healthy diet packed with whole grains, unprocessed and unrefined foods, fresh fruit and vegetables. Cut down on caffeine and alcohol, and instead drink plenty of water and herbal teas. It's also worth boosting your immune system with lots of antioxidant-rich foods such as berries, broccoli, watercress and Brazil nuts – aim to include each of these foods in your diet at least once a week. Diets low in protein, iron, B vitamins and zinc can cause balding so make sure you're getting enough of these. In particular, many women suffer from an iron deficiency, especially vegetarians. The main sign of this deficiency is fatigue, so if you suspect you're a sufferer see your GP for a blood test and ask about taking a multivitamin supplement with added iron.

Toxic cause: OVERSTYLING

Celeb watchers say Nancy Dell'Olio and Kate Beckinsale's worrying hair loss may be down to too many hair extensions. Glenn Kinsey, from hair loss specialists Mark Glenn Hair Enhancement, says women with thinning tresses should avoid the glued-in type of hair extension at all costs as they weaken your follicles and can even make very fine hair break off completely.

How to detoxify If your hair is thinning and you dream of longer, thicker locks but don't want a wig or damaging extensions, there is another option. The Mark Glenn salon specialises in a 'bridging technique' which places a fine mesh over your existing hair which is then used as a base for a hair



Christina Aguilera's over-processed locks are showing the strain



The bald patch isn't the only scary thing about Helena Bonham-Carter!

weave. Results are totally natural-looking and allow your hair to continue growing without any damage. Prices start at around £500, but if that's stretching your budget a little, speak to your hairdresser about getting the right cut and style to make your hair look as thick and healthy as possible.

Toxic cause: MEDICAL CONDITION

There are several medical conditions that could be causing your hair loss. If you notice more than 100 hairs a day falling out, there's a chance it could be caused by an underactive thyroid or polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS), where the ovaries are covered in lots of tiny cysts. PCOS can be diagnosed with an ultrasound investigation ordered by your GP. Another possible cause is androgenic alopecia, which affects a surprising number of women. This is caused by sensitivity to the hormone testosterone and is to do with your genetic make-up. Finally, if you've had a baby in the last six months you may have lost a lot of hair following the birth – this is completely normal and it should return within 18 months.

How to detoxify It's worth visiting your GP for further investigation if your hair falls out for three months or more. You can ask for blood tests to check your thyroid function, especially if you've been feeling very tired or have unusually dry skin. If androgenic alopecia is the problem, ask to be referred to a dermatologist for diagnosis and to find out more about potential treatments.

For more information about female hair loss, visit www.stophairlossnow.com.

For Mark Glenn Hair Enhancement log on to www.markglenn.com or call 020-7495 6969. Contact hair and scalp expert Peter Bannister at www.trichology.uk.com.

LOVE YOUR SCALP!

Essential oils can really help if you have patchy hair loss. A study by Aberdeen Royal Infirmary found that 44 per cent of patients who massaged their scalps with a blend of thyme, lavender, cedarwood, jojoba, rosemary and grapeseed essential oils saw a good amount of hair grow back. This was compared to just 15 per cent of patients who massaged their scalps with a plain oil.

'My hair fell out in clumps'

Michelle Clare, 33, always had lovely thick locks and was horrified when she discovered three bald patches...

I've suffered from eczema on my head for years but one night my boyfriend Gareth noticed it was looking quite bad, so he checked out my scalp. As he ran his hands through my hair I could hear him saying "Oh... Oh!". He turned to face me and said, 'Promise you won't freak out?' I'm going to get a mirror and show you the back of your head.' I wasn't particularly worried, but when he lifted my hair up I almost started hyperventilating. There were three completely bald patches, the size of 50p pieces. I'd always been so proud of my lovely, thick hair and suddenly it was falling out. It felt like I was losing my femininity. I'd had a really stressful couple of years putting in long hours at an internet company and to top it all, I'd just been made redundant. I thought stress might be the cause of my hair loss and went to see my naturopath, who was already treating me for eczema. He prescribed loads of supplements to help my hair, including iron and B vitamins, and extra green algae and vitamin C for my skin. Within two months it had started to grow back and I was so relieved. I know I can get easily stressed, so I also started meditating and practicing qigong (special breathing techniques and physical postures that balance your energy) to help me relax. My hair's back to normal now and I'm so pleased!

