

“Hair Care,” from Anna Fischer-Dückelmann, *The Wife as Family Doctor* (1911)

Abstract

This excerpt from a popular women's health reader illustrates the close relationship in Germany between chemical knowledge, consumer marketing, and the modern view of personhood as an aesthetic accomplishment. Creams, oils, perfumes, dyes, sartorial accoutrements: applied and commercialized science made all of these items, and more, available for sale. Women, in turn, purchased these items to manage and transform their hair to achieve their preferred image in social life. Such developments paved the way for even more influential innovations later in the twentieth century: industrially produced chemical cosmetics.

Source

Hair Care

It is generally known that thick and beautiful hair enhances our beauty in great measure; yet women are not fully knowledgeable about what damages hair or causes it to thrive.

There have been hairstyles that have led directly to hair loss by pulling the hair, tying it together in bundles, and pinning it firmly at the roots, or through heating devices that interfere with scalp perspiration and cause the hair to fall out, or further through the use of “curlers,” too frequent burning with a very hot iron, etc. Women have put their scalps through a great deal of nonsense, and if baldness does not occur more frequently among them, then that is only attributable, among other things, to their light headwear, which leaves their heads freer than those of men. Felt hats, heavy helmets, etc., which significantly inhibit heat radiation, are very detrimental to hair growth; in contrast, women's lightweight hats usually do not encumber the head at all. Frequent haircuts appear to weaken rather than strengthen the scalp's fecundity, and that may be yet another reason why there are far more bald heads among men than among women. The natural condition requires that hair be allowed to grow “as long as it wants to,” in any case, repeated trimming and cutting inhibits it. Undisputedly, baldness is a sad accompaniment to culture, one that has become frighteningly rampant in our times. Let us at least see to it that the female sex is spared! Bald women are the ugliest thing imaginable!

Even in the case of young girls, tightly tying, pinning, and burning the hair must be avoided. Hair must be washed and smoothed with wide-toothed combs and soft brushes; it should be worn undone, then braided in a loose, natural fashion. Frequent head cleansing is extremely beneficial for strengthening the scalp; every week pour water at 35-37 degrees centigrade over your head, either with a complete bath or without one. (See Figure 144) This provides not only for the cleansing of the scalp but also for increased blood circulation to it, and thereby promotes the nourishment of the hair papilla. Grasp the braided hair with one hand and lift it up to keep it from getting wet; squeeze the saturated sponge with the other hand and soak up the water from the basin. In this manner, head baths can be performed without servants. If you need to wash long hair occasionally for cleansing purposes, then hang it down in front of you and pour water over it. Hair grows from the roots, not the ends; if the fine vascular loops that surround the hair papilla (and from which the hair grows) atrophy or go without sufficiently nourishing blood flow, then the hair gradually dies. All methods for increasing the nutrition of the scalp will therefore also

promote hair growth, be it head baths, head packs, inunction with herbs, or head massage.



Fig. 144: Head washing (performed without assistance)

Common diseases, as well as nervous conditions, can limit blood flow; hair loss will be more frequent under these circumstances.

[...]

Maintaining the health of the sebaceous glands connected to the hairs is also essential for them to flourish; if they sicken, as in the case of various skin eruptions, then the associated hair will soon fall out. They secrete so much oil that the hair stays soft and shiny; if, in contrast, the hair seems brittle and dry, with a grayish shimmer, then the sebaceous glands are not performing their function and are secreting too little oil. In this case, the hair needs supplemental oil, which can be applied about twice a week in the form of fine oils. Nut oil (which darkens hair), almond oil (perfumed), tallow with rose oil, and the like are commonly used.

When buying commercial pomades, beware of rancid oils and therefore choose perfumed oils instead.

Never apply so much oil that your hair looks greasy and at the same time “oozes”; nature never creates that effect, except in the case of certain diseases of the sebaceous glands, seborrhea, or excessive oil secretion. But that is by all accounts a nasty condition that is certainly not worthy of imitation.

The head’s warmth also makes oil rancid; for that reason, oiled heads must be soaped all the more frequently. As oil, dandruff, and dust on the head can easily lead to the type of crusting that manifests as a yellow film on the scalp of many people, and as that film can only be removed with sharp, fine-toothed combs that irritate the scalp so much that small bloody wounds arise, frequent use of warm water is recommended in any case. It should not go unmentioned that healthy, well-groomed hair does not require artificial oiling; hair has its own oil and its own shine. This natural shine is especially enhanced by brushing.

Slightly wavy and curly hair is the most beautiful head ornament. The closely shorn modern men’s hairstyles are

therefore downright ugly; they offend our sense of beauty, although it cannot be denied that these styles are very comfortable in the summer heat. Women are well aware of the youthful effect of bangs, etc.; consequently, these forelocks are produced artfully by the old and the young, the beautiful and the unattractive – unfortunately, without creating the desired effect in some cases. Flirty curls do not suit older features, a sickly face, or unfortunate facial features, e.g., a bulbous nose or other such deviations of Mother Nature. There would be far fewer ugly women if they all understood how to adapt their grooming and dressing habits [*Toilette*] to their own body types, that is, to avoid unpleasant contrasts. For unattractive faces, a simple hairstyle, a modest hat, and the avoidance of garish colors usually works better than the opposite.

Artificial locks are consequently not for every woman, but a pleasing hairstyle and haircare regimen, such that the hair is full, shiny, soft, and wavy, remain desirable for everyone without exception, even in the case of older women. This can be achieved by frequently cleansing the hair, by arranging it loosely so that it falls in natural waves around the forehead after brushing and – the main source of all beauty – by maintaining the unimpaired health of our body.

As with other indicators (e.g., color, the shine, and the expression of our eyes), our hair registers illness, decline, age, and even nervous disturbances. Sometimes it is limp, lifeless, and unmanageable; at other times, it is amazingly oily without having been touched by pomade. At times, it appears darker, inclined to wave, then shinier. In a word, it is part of our body and thus participates in all the changes and processes of that body – in nervous individuals more so than in the more robust. The same applies to electrical phenomena in the hair, which are so pronounced in certain individuals that at certain times the hair cannot be combed out without producing visibly crackling sparks. This occurrence, too, varies according to the hair's health.

Everyone can make the most diverse observations based on his or her own hair.

Regarding development of dandruff and diseases of the scalp, see “The Healing Art” in Part III.

We must still devote a few lines to gray hair and hair dying.

Hair turning white is a sign of very advanced age but is completely unnatural at a youthful age. The phenomenon results from the disappearance of hair pigment and the penetration of air into the hair shaft. Stiffening of the hair, but not increased hair loss, is usually associated with this phenomenon.

Hair often turns white prematurely after emotional shocks or severe illnesses, or on account of heredity. This change is basically natural once you reach your sixties but not before then. Still, one often sees people who have a head of gray hair before they have reached their fortieth birthdays.

It is very understandable and far from unnatural for people with an otherwise youthful appearance and full vigor to seek out dye products to banish this untimely sign of age. But it is questionable, in some cases even ridiculous, for people to disguise their age and to feign long-lost youth by way of dye products. In such cases, one is justified in making fun of hair coloring.

Here, we advocate hair coloring only to remedy an anomaly or to combat premature graying, and not, for example, to transform brown hair to blond or for similar frivolities, or to suppress a natural sign of advanced age, when it is in fact appropriate.

How is hair best treated to restore lost color without damaging the hair or scalp?

There are countless hair dye products, but it is difficult to say which ones work the quickest and are still harmless. Metal-based preparations are the most effective, but they are rather questionable and attack the scalp. Various plant-based dye products are completely harmless, but they are unreliable because they either do not last long or they color unevenly. The result also depends on the natural sulfur content of the hair, to which the dyes chemically bind. The hair's natural oil content is also important. Therefore, candidates for hair coloring should conduct a few tests at first, but not without understanding several key points beforehand.

Nut extract, henna with added color from indigo-leaf powder, *Anacardium occidentale*, and other mixtures are basically simple hair products that do no harm but often deliver little benefit; yet they are often used. Frequently employed mineral substances are silver nitrate, lead, iron salts, potassium chromate, cadmium, etc. The most long-lasting, ostensibly harmless dye products are produced by silver nitrate, with prior treatment of the hair through the application of sulfur solutions. A silver nitrate solution with added ammonia results in blond or brown hair, depending on the ammonia content. Pyrogallol acid supposedly colors splendidly; however, it is very poisonous and therefore not recommended. Lead salts must be avoided because they are absorbed through the scalp into the organism and can lead to unpleasant poisoning effects. For that reason, do not buy the first dye product that comes along, however highly praised it may be in advertisements, and instead consult pharmacists and hairdressers, or have a chemical analysis done.

It is true that many products can be used for years without any evident harmful effects; however, it is also indisputable that many people have gotten a persistent head rash from coloring, or that their hair became noticeably brittle or fell out. It is clear that the frequent application of foreign substances to the scalp is not without consequences; the only question is whether we can compensate for the negative effects with countermeasures, or whether those effects are stronger than any countermeasures.

What are the countermeasures? First of all, strengthen the scalp, promote vigorous hair growth, and ensure good nutrition for the scalp – then mild dye products won't do much damage! Secondly, take care in applying coloring liquids, and make sure that they do not come into contact with your scalp.

To make hair more receptive to the dye, thoroughly cleanse it with warm water and some soda or soap before each coloring session. As a result, it will lose its natural oil for a short time. Once set, the color is not affected by water; thus, the warm head baths that benefit the scalp so greatly (without affecting the color) can be performed frequently, contributing significantly to the scalp's health.

Lemon juice can be used to remove coloring from hair.

The correct choice of dye product, frequent warm head baths, careful application – usually necessary every four weeks – make it possible for people with otherwise normal scalps to tolerate hair coloring for years without any damage. Frequent lubrication of the hair with nut oil is very advantageous to prevent dullness and brittleness.

We take from Dr. Thimm's book, *Theory and Care of Beauty* [*Lehre und Pflege der Schönheit*], the following instructive and cautionary information about commercial hair dyes: "Eau de Bahama" contains lead acetate and sublimed sulfur; "Eau de Cythère" contains lead chloride and sodium hydrosulfite; Rosetter's Hair Regenerator contains lead acetate, sulfur, and glycerin; Professor Wood's Hair Restorative contains lead; Indian Hair Tonic also contains lead, etc.

Of little worth are coloring products that work unevenly and wear off rapidly, quickly staining pillowcases and such. Dye products must be selected in accordance with the hair's texture; the advice of an experienced

hairdresser is therefore highly advisable, and for that reason we are wary of recommending any one product. At the same time, we cannot fail to mention here the effects of the Hensel Salt Cure on hair growth. Supplementing with sulfur and silicic acid (taken by mouth for months), in which many chronically ill persons are deficient, sometimes produces surprising results. (See "Hensel Cure")

Source: Anna Fischer-Dückelmann, *Die Frau als Hausärztin: ein ärztliches Nachschlagebuch der Gesundheitspflege und Heilkunde in der Familie, mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Frauen- und Kinderkrankheiten, Geburtshilfe und Kinderpflege*. Stuttgart: Süddeutsches Verlags-Institut, 1911, pp. 210-15.
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