

# HATS OFF

NEW TREATMENTS ARE MAKING FULLER, THICKER, LONGER, STRONGER HAIR A REALITY.  
BY SANDRA BALLENTINE.  
PHOTOGRAPHED BY DAVID SIMS.

In the animal kingdom, a good coat can attract the right mate. Things aren't so different in our world. Let's face it: We tend to judge each other by our hair. It can be a symbol of good health and of youth, and a defining signature that makes us feel sexy.

A lot of things, including genetic destiny, can stand between you and an amazing head of hair. While thinning hair has become socially acceptable (even attractive sometimes) in men, for women it is most often devastating. Stress, illness, pregnancy, thyroid conditions, hormonal issues, anemia, and autoimmune disorders like lupus can all lead to hair loss, both temporary and long-term, as can poor diet and ordinary aging. It's a follicular minefield out there.

Looking back at my own history, I regret that I didn't take my hair more seriously. When I started losing it, I did what a lot of otherwise smart, well-informed women in complete denial do: I ignored it, hoping it would go away. And a lot of it did. The tricky part, then as now, was getting it back.

I remember having dubious (and expensive) vitamin shots in my scalp in the late nineties, and recoiling in horror when a famous dermatologist suggested Rogaine a few years later. I didn't want to be seen purchasing a product for bald men at my local Duane Reade, nor did I care to foam up my \$90 blow-dry. The sparser things got, the more potentially damaging hair dryers and flatirons I required in order to keep up appearances. When I came across a frightening recent photo of myself at a fashionable London restaurant—the overhead lighting revealing a glaring bare spot near my part—I realized I had to take action, *immediately*.

My first call was to dermatologist (and hair authority) Fredric Brandt, M.D. Minoxidil—the active ingredient in both Rogaine and Pantene's new Hair Regrowth Treatment for Women—"is still the only FDA-approved topical for women, and it does work," says Dr. Brandt. "I'll learn of a

commitment to Rogaine. Minoxidil is a strong chemical, a drug, and once you stop using it, any freshly grown hair—which is mostly baby-fine, with the consistency of a dusting of ground cover—can fall out. I wanted other options.

When I heard that New York dermatologist David Colbert, M.D., was injecting platelet-rich plasma (PRP) into the scalp, I made an appointment right away. Originally used on athletes to treat joint inflammation and in surgery to facilitate wound healing, PRP has lately made the jump to cosmetic injectable. Unlike dermal fillers such as Restylane, PRP floods a targeted area with growth factor drawn from your own blood, which is said to encourage cells to make more collagen and elastin, naturally plumping the skin. If your hair follicle is the seed that grows a plant, think of PRP as the fertilizer, said Colbert. He has been injecting it into people's scalps for a little over a year and plans to begin combining it with other treatments like LED laser light—which he hopes will energize the follicles, making them more receptive to the nutrient-rich broth. Thus far, he's seen "a reasonable amount of hair regrowth" in patients, which he estimates to be about a 10 percent improvement. "It's a start," he said. "The future of PRP is what's really exciting." After an assistant expertly drew a tube of my blood and refined it via centrifuge to isolate the growth factors, the doctor injected the clear plasma into the thinning area above my forehead. For someone who is used to Botox needles, it barely hurt. Fifteen minutes later, and with my Orlo Salon blow-dry intact, he was finished. To see results I would have to repeat the \$2,500 process once a month for three months.

In Sarasota, Florida, Joseph Greco, Ph.D., the groundbreaking hair-restoration doctor who started using PRP on both transplant and nonsurgical patients back in 2007, has something even more potent up his sleeve: PRP combined with cytokine-rich plasma (CRP), a more purified version developed by the biotech company he cofounded. While PRP alone "has more of a delayed-action release over time," CRP, stripped of red and white blood cells and platelets, "provides an immediate burst of growth factors. It's basically liquid gold," he says of the \$1,700 treatment. The founder of the popular Web site Women's Hair Loss Project, who goes by the initial Y online, flies in from Los Angeles every four to six months for it. "I saw reduced shedding after one appointment, and now, after nine sessions, I find I'm keeping more hair, and it's of much better quality," says the pretty 36-year-old.

For the first time in years, there is much to look forward to on the hair-growth horizon. In one closely watched trial, researchers tested the key ingredient in Latisse—that wonder product that causes longer, lusher eyelashes to miraculously sprout—on the scalp. Angela Christiano, Ph.D., a professor of dermatology and genetics at Columbia University, made headlines last year when she spearheaded a study in which dermal papillae (cells that play a critical role in hair formation and growth) were used to grow human hairs on human skin, albeit skin that was grafted onto mice. The technique—in which hairs harvested from a small strip of skin behind the ear are used to grow hair-follicle stem-cell cultures—could have important implications for women with diffuse hair loss. "In the future, these could provide a permanent supply of your own stem cells that can be grown at any time to regenerate new hairs," explains Christiano.

While I wait for my next PRP appointment, Colbert has some simple advice: Take care of the hair you have. "Keep

minutes until you hear the paddle splashing through the buttermilk.

And yet it's a difficult craft to master. Daniel Patterson of Coi, the San Francisco restaurant with two Michelin stars, first shared a simple recipe for butter in 2007; last year, he published a lengthy, lyrical revision in *Coi: Stories and Recipes*. "The first time I made it, I thought, Oh, my God, all I have to do is overwhip cream," Patterson told me. "Now I see it's one of those simple things that's a lifelong craft. Every year we get it a little better."

Some rules: One, temperature affects texture—you need to temper your cream, then let it rest and cool, and warm it slightly before churning. Two, the slower the churn, the better the mouthfeel. Three, culturing cream is a dark art—some inoculate cream with yogurt (others consider that blasphemy); some simply pour cream into a container, cover, and let it sit out overnight (for a quick culture), or in the refrigerator for three days or longer (for a slow culture), until the cream thickens and starts to foam. The Butter Vikings use a secret cocktail of dairy cultures and went silent when I asked them to tell me more.

The most important thing is to use good ingredients. "It has a lot to do with the raw materials—what's in there?" asked Elaine Khosrova, the founding editor of *Culture*, a magazine about cheese. Khosrova is writing a book on butter to be published next year. "The beauty of dairy products is that you can't control them 100 percent. There is some serendipity, and a lot of it is how you treat the animals."

"It comes down to the quality of the cream," agrees Patterson. Professionals have access to cream you can't find in the retail market. The problem, according to Patterson, is "you're funneled to common sources."

I did the best I could with what I could find at gourmet stores and farmer's

markets. I found that health-food stores carry the best selection of dairy, and settled on a cream from Battenkill Valley Creamery in upstate New York.

After weeks of tinkering, I had a refrigerator full of butter. I needed to clear space, so I invited some friends to meet me at Third Rail, an excellent coffee shop in lower Manhattan with a view of St. Mark's Church. I found some truly delicious American cultured butters—from Evans' Farmhouse Creamery in New York and McClelland's Dairy in California—and brought them in as ringers, but most of the butters on the table were mine.

You'd be surprised how many people will show up on an unseasonably cold morning for a butter party. As a lark, I brought a Mason jar filled almost to the top with cream and told everybody to take turns shaking it. The jar made its way around the room, conversation-hopping until it found its way into my hands, just as the buttermilk and butterfat started to separate.

I shook it the rest of the way, dumped the contents into a cheesecloth-lined strainer, and sprinkled it with sea salt. It was a runny mess, and somehow mesmerizing. Even though everybody there was primed on the basics of butter-making, when I put the butter on the table, the room of grown adults approached it with innocent wonder. Was it the finest butter, with the most delicate taste and prettiest texture? No, but it was the most popular. The puppy in the dog park always draws a crowd. □

## HATS OFF

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 252

he said firmly. "Your hair is a fiber. Would you throw your eight-ply cashmere sweater in the dryer?" (Probably, knowing me.) So, as part of my new proactive approach, I've been sampling the

latest high-tech shampoos, conditioners, and leave-in serums, which Colbert says should act synergistically with the PRP, amplifying its effects. Renokin (a line from Korea recommended by Brandt) and Renaissance (the new range from Gregory Brown, M.D., of RéVive—skin care fame) both contain growth-factor peptides, which help stimulate dormant follicles. "Up until now, it's been either minoxidil or snake oil," says Brown. "This isn't going to help a person who is bald, but we've seen a 10 percent increase in hair density after three to four months using the products." Revita shampoo, from DS Laboratories—bolstered by thirteen active ingredients—promises thicker, more fabulous hair in as little as a month. Mine looked more luxurious after just three applications. I've even been trying the iGrow, a space-age-y, helmet-like device that uses LLLT—low-level laser therapy. Pending FDA approval for use by women (it's already approved for men), it has been shown—when worn for 25 minutes every other day for four to six months—to promote hair growth by stimulating unhealthy cells within the follicle into an active growth stage. Chia Chi Kao, M.D., a Santa Monica plastic surgeon, ordered six of the \$695 devices for his office. When I opened the door wearing mine on a recent afternoon, the UPS guy couldn't keep a straight face.

And that's just it: When you have a hair issue, you'll do almost anything to solve it. You throw everything you possibly can at it and hope something sticks. It's too early to tell if the zany helmet, the PRP, or the supercharged shampoos lining my shower shelves are making a quantifiable difference, but for the first time in years, my hair feels more luxurious, and I could swear it's thicker on top. The people who know my hair best—my stylist and my colorist—concur. What's better than that? □

# IN THIS ISSUE

**Table of contents 38:** Skirt, \$245; shopbop.com. Blouse, \$198; equipmentfr.com. Sandals, price upon request; Marc Jacobs stores. **48:** On Pivovarov: Tweed one-shoulder top with maroon-colored sleeve, price upon request; by special order at Barneys New York, NYC. Shirt, \$165; select Ralph Lauren stores. Skirt, \$995; burberry.com. Marni necklace, \$500; Marni boutiques. Brooks Brothers belt, \$98; brooksbrothers.com. Heels, \$1,050; Barneys New York, NYC. Additional production support, Jorge Bernos. **Cover look 52:** Dress (\$3,200) and hat (\$695); select Gucci boutiques. Manicure, April Foreman. **Vogue.com 56:** Guipure-flower tweed top and corseted skirt with

information. Bag, \$1,595; kimazabete.com. Knit-and-calfskin boots, \$1,095; select Chanel boutiques. **Editor's letter 70:** Jacket, \$860; sandro-paris.com. Shirt, \$80; guess.com. Serena jeans, \$178; True Religion stores. Manicure, April Foreman. **Contributors 90:** On Blake: Suit, \$3,500; Dior Homme boutiques. Balenciaga shirt, \$355; Balenciaga, NYC. Saint Laurent by Hedi Slimane tie, \$245; Saint Laurent, NYC. Cos socks, \$7; cosstores.com. **Up front 92:** Coat, \$1,995; By George, Austin, TX. **Lives 98:** Dress, price upon request; Fendi, NYC, for similar styles. On her right hand: Cartier 18K white gold—and-black lacquer Paris Nouvelle Vague ring with diamonds, price upon

pumps, \$625; Christian Louboutin, Beverly Hills. **Flash 112:** Georgette dress, \$3,490; Saint Laurent, NYC. Watch, \$6,400; select Louis Vuitton boutiques. Sequined bag, \$1,450; Bergdorf Goodman, NYC. **116:** Right: Albertus Swanepoel hat. Manicure, Emi Kudo. **126:** Necklace with diamonds, sapphires, amethysts, tanzanite, and opal, \$13,750; net-a-porter.com. Beetle brooch, \$395; Vera Wang, NYC. **View 141:** Silk-lace dress, \$7,790. Dolce & Gabbana headband with silk almond blossoms (\$1,465) and earrings with ceramic flowers (\$1,830); select Dolce & Gabbana boutiques. Manicure, Philippe Ovak. **144:** On Modrone: Madina Visconti di Modrone feather headband (price upon

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