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BEAUTY

Graying Gracefully

By Dr. Gaby Longworth

Whether due to Covid or a growing awareness of embracing all things natural, more and more women (and men) are choosing to embrace their natural grays. Rather than trying to brainwash you to reverse or hide the graying, this article highlights the health and freedom associated with ditching the dye.

There are so many benefits to letting your silvers shine, including eliminating those annoying touch-ups every 3 to 4 weeks, saving a bunch of money (all that dye really adds up), and choosing to ban those harmful hair chemicals for better health. Besides, silvers in all their forms are simply gorgeous and look beautiful on practically everyone. You and your gray hair can look shiny, healthy, and attractive.

Whatever led you down the path, here are some habits and tips for going gorgeously gray while staying and looking young.

New Hair Growth

An unexpected but wonderful benefit of quitting the dye is healthy new hair growth. Hair dyes are toxic, impede hair growth, get under fingernails, and stain the scalp. In addition, hair dye often causes itching. Even worse, there are reports of eye-tingling sensations and rashes after years of dying hair. Not to mention those chemicals going down the drain and into the environment. Say goodbye to all of this when you embrace your silvers! And welcome all the new hair growth.

Moisture is Key

With age, hair loses density, shine, and pigment, and the oil glands in the scalp produce less sebum. That's one reason why gray hair is rougher and drier than pigmented hair. Compared to straight gray hair, gray curly hair can be even more dry and wiry than pigmented gray hair. Add more moisture to your hair care

routine with weekly deep conditioning (home) treatments and using a moisturizing leave-in and/or cream. Use gentle cleansing products because sulfated cleansers can be drying and harsh on gray hair.

1. Avoid Build-Up

Contrary to popular belief, gray hair is not white, but transparent like glass. It generally has higher dye uptake (semi-permanent or permanent) during hair coloring treatments. This is potentially due to the higher level of porosity and surface roughness, which facilitates the penetration of chemicals. Generally, grey hair can strongly uptake chemical agents, conditioners, and oils. If you have fine hair, go easy on heavy conditioners or leave-ins, as too much product can “build up” very quickly, resulting in limp and dull-looking gray hair.

2. What You Need to Know About Colored Hair Products

Melanin has a protective effect against ultraviolet radiation (UVR). Gray hair lacks this natural protective mechanism making it more sensitive to the sun’s rays, which results in the oxidation of hair proteins. That is why white and gray hair is more likely to oxidize, looking yellow and tarnished. Sulfates also have this effect on gray hair and can cause frizz, dryness, and yellowing. Because silver hair is susceptible to yellowing, always cover your hair if in bright sunlight for an extended period of time.

You can also try adding a blue or purple conditioning toner for silver, brunette, blonde, or b’lorange toned hair (*aka brassy and orange*). Purple shampoos may help cancel out any yellow tones for blonds, while blue products cancel out orange or brassy tones in brunettes. Note that many purple shampoos contain sulfates and are drying, so be careful choosing one. Another way to get rid of the yellow tinge is to use kaolin white clay.

Prevent yellowing by only using clear or white-colored products on your hair. Avoid getting (yellow) oils or vitamin C serum on gray hair as it will stain.

For the whitest whites, avoid all purple and blue products as these products deposit pigments on the hair to make the grays brighter. It is enough to use a gentle clarifying shampoo and white-colored hair products to keep the silvers as white and shiny as possible.

3. Maintain a healthy diet and stay hydrated

The quality of our diet is a major factor in our hair, nails, and skin health. When our diet is poor or deficient in certain nutrients, tissues such as hair and nails are the first to show it, as the body considers them less essential.

The key components of hair include proteins, essential fatty acids, vitamins, and minerals, and these are needed for healthy hair growth. If the diet is deficient in any of these key components, it can cause hair loss, color changes, and hair breakage.

For example, people with an iron or vitamin D deficiency may experience acute hair loss, a condition known as telogen effluvium. Other common deficiencies that are especially notable because they can impede hair growth include low levels of vitamins A, C, and E, zinc, magnesium, selenium, and biotin (a form of vitamin B). Thyroid disease can also lead to hair loss.

A poor diet rich in processed foods and simple sugars stimulates inflammation in the body. It can also lead to increased androgen production, which in women with androgenic alopecia, can boost the hair thinning and balding process. Simple sugars in sodas, juices, donuts, bagels, pizzas, white breads, and sugary cereals have little or no nutritious value.

A balanced diet free of (or low in) processed foods and high in vegetables (especially green leafy vegetables) and healthy fats, proteins, and complex carbs is ideal for both weight control and thriving skin and hair. So is drinking more water, chewing longer, and eating slower.

Stay Fresh and Modern

When you grow out the gray, reevaluate your entire look. The colors you used to wear may need to be updated. Your grays may benefit from a more flattering hairstyle. Changing your haircut, glasses (shape and color), lipstick shades, and clothes can significantly enhance your complexion and keep the motivation going.

Patience is a Virtue

You will not see results overnight. If you are committed to ditching the dye, you will be rewarded with more silver every month as your hair grows naturally. Using “clean” products and practicing healthy habits will also make your hair and scalp healthier. Depending on how long your hair is, the process of growing out your silver can take 6 to 36 months.

And remember, you can always change your mind if you do not like how it makes you feel or look.

Dr. Gaby Longworth holds a Ph.D. in human genetics and molecular biology from the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine on top of being a certified hair practitioner and the creator of [Absolutely Everything Curly](https://absolutelyeverythingcurly.com/) Link: (<https://absolutelyeverythingcurly.com/>) and [CurlPlanet](https://curlplanet.com/#/) Link: (<https://curlplanet.com/#/>), two online resources for people with textured hair.