

Hair Vitamins and Minerals: What to Eat for Healthy Hair

Long, thick, healthy-looking hair is something many women want, which helps explain why store shelves and social media feeds are filled with products promising faster hair growth.

Biotin gummies.

Hair vitamins.

Collagen powders.

Iron supplements.

Zinc tablets.

“Hair, skin and nails” capsules.

But healthy hair is more complicated than taking one vitamin.

Your hair follicles depend on a steady supply of energy, protein, vitamins, minerals, and other nutrients. If your body does not receive enough of certain nutrients, hair growth may be affected.

However, there is an equally important message:

Taking more vitamins than your body needs does not necessarily make your hair grow faster or thicker.

In fact, excessive amounts of certain nutrients can actually contribute to hair loss.

The best strategy is to make sure your body receives adequate nutrition, investigate possible deficiencies when hair loss occurs, and avoid randomly combining large doses of supplements.

Here are some of the nutrients most closely connected with healthy hair—and how to get them.

Hair Health Starts With Your Overall Diet

Hair may feel cosmetically important, but your body does not consider it essential for survival.

When nutrition becomes severely inadequate, the body prioritizes organs and biological functions that are more important for keeping you alive.

Hair growth may suffer.

The American Academy of Dermatology notes that consuming too little **protein, iron, biotin, or zinc** can contribute to noticeable hair loss. Eating too few calories overall can also cause significant hair shedding.

This is why extreme crash dieting can sometimes be followed by noticeable shedding months later.

Rather than focusing only on supplements, begin with your overall eating pattern.

Our [Healthy Diet for Women to Stay Fit](#) guide can help you build balanced meals containing protein, vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and healthy fats.

You can also use our [Foods to Buy for Healthy Eating](#) guide to create a more nutrient-rich grocery list.

Protein: One of the Foundations of Healthy Hair

Hair is primarily composed of a protein called **keratin**.

That does not mean eating keratin itself makes hair grow, but your body does need adequate dietary protein to produce and maintain tissues—including hair.

Good protein sources include:

- Eggs
- Chicken
- Turkey
- Fish
- Greek yogurt
- Cottage cheese
- Lean beef
- Beans
- Lentils
- Tofu
- Tempeh
- Nuts and seeds

If your diet is extremely low in protein, increasing your intake to an appropriate level may be important for both overall health and normal hair growth.

This is particularly worth considering if you:

- Follow a highly restrictive diet
- Frequently skip meals
- Have recently lost a large amount of weight
- Follow a vegan or vegetarian diet without planning protein sources
- Have undergone bariatric surgery
- Have a condition affecting nutrient absorption

Protein needs vary between women depending on body size, activity level, health status, and goals.

If you are unsure how to structure your meals around your individual nutrition needs, our [Custom Women's Diet & Fitness Plan](#) can help create a food and fitness plan around your

goals, schedule, food preferences, and lifestyle.

Iron and Hair Loss

Iron deserves particular attention in women.

Your body uses iron to produce hemoglobin, which helps red blood cells transport oxygen.

Women who menstruate can be more vulnerable to iron deficiency because iron is lost through menstrual bleeding—particularly when periods are very heavy.

Low iron status can contribute to hair shedding in some people.

The American Academy of Dermatology recommends confirming an iron deficiency rather than automatically taking an iron supplement for hair loss. If blood testing shows that iron is low, a healthcare professional may recommend supplementation.

Iron-rich foods include:

- Lean red meat
- Poultry
- Seafood
- Beans
- Lentils
- Spinach and other leafy greens
- Iron-fortified cereals
- Other fortified foods

Plant-based iron is generally absorbed less efficiently than the iron found in animal foods.

Pairing plant-based iron sources with foods containing vitamin C—such as bell peppers, oranges, strawberries, or tomatoes—can improve absorption.

Do Not Take Iron “Just in Case”

More iron is not automatically better.

Too much supplemental iron can cause side effects and, in large amounts, can be toxic.

If you are experiencing hair loss along with symptoms such as:

- Unusual fatigue
- Weakness
- Shortness of breath
- Dizziness
- Pale skin
- Heavy menstrual bleeding

ask your healthcare provider whether testing for iron deficiency or anemia is appropriate.

Zinc

Zinc is involved in many biological processes, including normal cell growth and immune function.

Severe zinc deficiency can cause hair loss.

Foods containing zinc include:

- Oysters
- Beef
- Poultry
- Seafood
- Beans
- Nuts
- Whole grains
- Dairy products

Women who follow vegetarian or vegan diets may need to pay additional attention to zinc because some plant compounds can reduce zinc absorption.

But once again, more is not always better.

Large amounts of zinc from supplements can cause nausea and vomiting and may interfere with copper status.

The goal is to correct a deficiency—not to flood your body with zinc in hopes that your hair will suddenly become thicker.

Biotin: The Famous “Hair Vitamin”

Few nutrients are marketed for hair as aggressively as **biotin**.

Biotin is a B vitamin that helps your body process carbohydrates, fats, and proteins.

Biotin deficiency can cause:

- Thinning hair
- Loss of body hair
- Skin rash
- Brittle nails

But there is an important catch.

True biotin deficiency is rare.

Most people get enough biotin from food.

Biotin can be found in foods such as:

- Eggs
- Fish
- Meat
- Nuts
- Seeds
- Sweet potatoes
- Spinach
- Broccoli

Because biotin deficiency can cause hair loss, supplement manufacturers often make the leap:

Biotin deficiency causes hair loss → therefore large amounts of biotin must grow more hair.

That logic does not necessarily hold.

The National Institutes of Health reports that scientific evidence supporting high-dose biotin supplements for improving hair, skin, and nails in people without a deficiency is limited.

High-Dose Biotin Can Affect Blood Tests

This is especially important.

Many hair supplements contain thousands of micrograms of biotin.

High-dose biotin can interfere with certain laboratory tests and produce misleading results, including some tests related to thyroid function.

If you take a high-dose biotin supplement, tell your healthcare provider before blood testing.

Do not assume that because biotin is a vitamin, extremely large amounts are automatically useful.

Vitamin D

Vitamin D is important for many functions involving bones, muscles, immunity, and other tissues.

Researchers have also examined possible relationships between vitamin D status and different forms of hair loss.

However, having thinning hair does not automatically mean you have a vitamin D deficiency.

Your healthcare provider may check vitamin D if your symptoms and medical history suggest testing is appropriate.

Food sources include:

- Fatty fish
- Egg yolks
- Fortified milk
- Fortified plant milks
- Certain fortified foods

Your body can also make vitamin D when skin is exposed to sunlight.

Supplement needs should be individualized.

Vitamin B12

Vitamin B12 helps maintain healthy nerve cells and supports red blood cell production.

Most natural food sources of B12 come from animal products, including:

- Meat
- Fish
- Eggs
- Milk
- Yogurt
- Cheese

Some foods are also fortified with B12.

Women following strict vegan diets need to pay particular attention to B12 because plant foods generally do not naturally provide reliable amounts.

A deficiency can cause anemia and neurological symptoms and may occur alongside other nutritional problems that affect overall health.

Rather than diagnosing a B12 deficiency because your hair is thinning, have your healthcare provider evaluate whether testing is appropriate.

Vitamin C

Vitamin C is best known for supporting immune function, but it has another valuable nutritional role:

It helps your body absorb **non-heme iron**, the type of iron found primarily in plant foods.

Good sources include:

- Oranges
- Strawberries
- Kiwi
- Bell peppers
- Tomatoes
- Broccoli
- Citrus fruits

This is why combining foods can be useful.

For example:

Lentils + bell peppers

or

Spinach + strawberries

provides plant-based iron along with vitamin C.



Selenium: A Perfect Example of Why More Is Not Better

Selenium is an essential trace mineral.

Your body needs some selenium—but excessive amounts can cause problems.

In fact, one of the characteristic signs of excessive selenium intake is **hair loss**. Other signs can include brittle nails, skin rash, nausea, diarrhea, fatigue, and a metallic taste.

Brazil nuts are famously rich in selenium.

A single Brazil nut can contain a substantial amount, which means eating large quantities every day while also taking selenium-containing supplements may provide much more than you need.

This demonstrates an important principle:

A nutrient that is necessary for health can become harmful in

excessive amounts.

Vitamin A: Another Nutrient You Should Not Overdo

Vitamin A supports vision, immune function, reproduction, and normal cell development.

Foods containing vitamin A or carotenoids include:

- Sweet potatoes
- Carrots
- Spinach
- Eggs
- Dairy products
- Liver

But high amounts of **preformed vitamin A** from supplements can become toxic.

Chronic excessive intake can produce health problems, and very high doses during pregnancy are particularly concerning because certain forms of vitamin A can cause birth defects.

So if you take:

A multivitamin.

A prenatal.

A hair supplement.

A skin supplement.

and another separate vitamin...

you may unintentionally duplicate nutrients.

Always look at the total amounts.

Do Hair Vitamins Actually Work?

Sometimes—but it depends on why your hair is thinning.

If you truly have a nutrient deficiency, correcting that deficiency may help hair recover.

The American Academy of Dermatology notes that when hair loss is related to insufficient iron, zinc, biotin, or protein, correcting the missing nutrient may allow regrowth.

But if your nutrient levels are already adequate, taking more may provide little or no benefit.

Hair loss can also be caused by:

- Genetics
- Female-pattern hair loss
- Thyroid disease
- Hormonal conditions
- Polycystic ovary syndrome
- Pregnancy and postpartum hormonal changes
- Certain medications
- Autoimmune conditions
- Major illness
- Severe stress
- Rapid weight loss
- Tight hairstyles
- Scalp disorders
- Aging

A vitamin cannot correct every one of these causes.

Your Hair Loss Might Not Be a Nutrition Problem

This is perhaps the biggest mistake people make.

They notice shedding.

They immediately order:

Biotin.

Collagen.

Iron.

Zinc.

Vitamin D.

A multivitamin.

A hair-growth gummy.

But nobody investigates **why the hair is falling out**.

The American Academy of Dermatology recommends seeing a dermatologist for unexplained hair loss because there are many possible causes, and treatment works best when the underlying cause is correctly identified.

See a healthcare professional if you notice:

- Sudden heavy shedding
- Bald patches
- Widening of your hair part
- Receding hairline
- Scalp pain or itching
- Scarring
- Hair loss accompanied by fatigue or other symptoms
- Hair loss that continues worsening
- Significant thinning after rapid weight loss

Avoid Extreme Weight-Loss Diets

If you are trying to lose weight, your hair still needs adequate nutrition.

Eating dramatically too few calories or cutting out large food groups can lead to nutrient deficiencies and may trigger substantial hair shedding.

A sustainable eating plan should support weight management **and** provide enough:

- Protein
- Iron
- Vitamins
- Minerals
- Essential fats
- Overall energy

This is another reason individualized nutrition can be valuable.

If you are working toward weight loss, read our guide on [How to Create a Personalized Meal Plan for Weight Loss](#) and consider whether your diet is giving your body enough nutrition—not simply whether the calorie number is low.

A Simple Hair-Healthy Grocery List

Instead of immediately buying another supplement bottle, begin in the grocery store.

Consider foods such as:

Protein

Eggs

Chicken

Turkey

Salmon

Greek yogurt

Beans

Lentils

Tofu

Iron-containing foods

Lean beef
Beans
Lentils
Leafy greens
Fortified cereals

Zinc-containing foods

Seafood
Beef
Chicken
Beans
Nuts
Seeds

Biotin-containing foods

Eggs
Salmon
Almonds
Sweet potatoes
Spinach

Vitamin C foods

Bell peppers
Strawberries
Oranges
Kiwi
Broccoli

Healthy fats

Salmon
Avocado
Nuts

Seeds

Olive oil

A varied diet makes it easier to obtain numerous nutrients simultaneously instead of trying to isolate every vitamin in a bottle.

The Bottom Line

Healthy hair depends partly on good nutrition.

Your body needs adequate:

- Protein
- Iron
- Zinc
- Biotin
- Vitamin B12
- Vitamin D
- Vitamin C
- Selenium
- Vitamin A
- Other nutrients

But this does not mean taking large amounts of every nutrient will make your hair grow faster.

In fact, excessive amounts of some nutrients can cause health problems—and some can even contribute to hair loss.

The better approach is:

Eat a balanced diet.

Consume adequate protein.

Include a variety of vegetables and fruits.

Choose iron- and zinc-containing foods.

Avoid extreme dieting.

Investigate possible deficiencies if you are experiencing unexplained hair loss.

And do not automatically assume every hair problem can be solved with biotin gummies.

If your hair is suddenly thinning or shedding excessively, determine the cause before spending hundreds of dollars on supplements.

Sometimes nutrition really is part of the problem.

But sometimes your hair is trying to tell you that something else deserves attention.

If you want help creating an eating plan around your individual nutrition goals, lifestyle, schedule, and fitness needs, learn more about our [Custom Women's Diet & Fitness Plan](#).

Healthy hair starts with more than what you put **on** your hair.

It also depends on how well you nourish the body growing it.

This article is for general educational purposes and is not intended to diagnose or treat hair loss, nutritional deficiencies, or other medical conditions. Speak with a qualified healthcare professional or dermatologist about persistent or unexplained hair loss before beginning high-dose vitamin or mineral supplements.