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## White flakes in hair

You're not the Queen of Dragons or an elderly wizard, so why is your hair already turning white? If it feels like you woke up one day and locked eyes with Gandalf the White in your mirror, don't panic. Not only can you cover the white with hair dye, but depending on what's causing it, you may also be able to prevent or reverse it. Another viable option: You can own it (get it, Khaleesi ☞). Share on PinterestWhite hair trends on the regular. There's a parade of celebs who have rocked a white mane: Kate Moss, Pink, and Lady Gaga, to name a few — and we can't forget to pay homage to the man who invented young white hair: Max Joseph from MTV's "Catfish." \*swoon\*The point is, you're not only accidentally on-trend, you're also normal. There's a slew of legit reasons for premature white hair, but the causes and prevention methods aren't always black and white. Let's start with the basics. Your skin is covered with tiny holes called hair follicles. These hair follicles give your hair its color through cells called melanocytes, which create the pigment melanin. Over time, your hair follicles produce fewer and fewer melanocytes, which means your hair loses its pigment, becoming white, silver, or gray as you age. White hairs are way more obvious on folks whose hair is usually black or brown (contrast, people), but lighter hair is just as likely to go white or gray, if not more likely. White hairs are typically a sign of aging, but they're not timekeepers — they can pop up whenever they feel like it. That being said, it's common to notice white or gray hairs in your 30s or 40s. A 2011 study found that a silver mane usually hits men and women around the same time (hello, 40!), but the location of the first grays may vary. Men seem to sprout their first ones in the temple area, while women see them pop up around the forehead. Pretty much everyone gets some gray hairs by the time they're 60. It's just part of aging, y'all. How early is too early for white hair depends on your genetics. A 2013 study suggested that white or gray hair is considered premature if it pops up before age 30 for black folks, age 25 for folks of Asian descent, and age 20 for white folks. The study also found that early-onset grays didn't mean faster progress, so no worries there. But why are you getting these early white strands in the first place? Genetic factors can be fun when you're talking about your mom's gorgeous cheekbones or your dad's height, but they might be a little less pleasant when it comes to things like premature white hair. Alas, there's a hefty link between early white hair and genetics, which you can't do anything about. \*shrug\* A 2016 study of people of European, Native American, and African descent even found a gene that researchers believe is responsible for 30 percent of gray hair. This gene is also more prevalent in people with lighter hair colors (thanks, Mom!). 2. SmokingLifestyle choices like smoking also come into play. Lighting up is known to speed up skin aging and can cause premature grays. A 2013 study found that people who smoke cigarettes have more gray hair before age 30. 3. StressRemember your parents saying, "You kids are turning my hair gray"? Well, there may be some truth to it. Stress is thought to cause premature white hair because it depletes melanocyte stem cells (which help create hair color). Researchers in a recent study found that mice exposed to stress had more depleted melanocyte stem cells in their hair follicles. The more stressed the mice, the less pigment their melanocytes produced. This would also explain why U.S. presidents often seem to have more gray hair at the end of their terms! 4. Alopecia areataAlopecia areata is an autoimmune disease that can cause hair loss. In some cases, it also causes regrown hair to lose pigment, thanks to a melanin deficiency. 5. VitiligoNearly 1 percent of the world's population has vitiligo, an autoimmune disease that causes areas of the skin to lose pigmentation. This can also affect parts of the body that have hair, turning the hair white or gray. 6. Thyroid disordersHormonal changes due to thyroid conditions like hyperthyroidism or hypothyroidism can also be to blame for too-soon white hair. Thyroid health actually plays a big role in hair color. If your thyroid is overactive or underactive, it can cause your body to create less melanin, which you need for pigmented hair. 7. Vitamin deficienciesVitamin B-12 is the big boss of vitamins. It not only gives you energy but also contributes to hair growth and hair color. B-12 helps healthy red blood cells carry oxygen to the other cells in your body, which — you guessed it — includes your hair cells. A lack of B-12 can mess with melanin production, leading to loss of pigment. BTW, sometimes the cause of a vitamin B-12 deficiency is pernicious anemia. This condition makes it impossible for your body to absorb the B-12 needed to create enough healthy red blood cells. Vitamins B-6, D, and E and biotin are crucial to hair health too. A deficiency of the mineral copper can also hurt melanin production and lead to gray hair. 8. Oxidative stressOxidative stress is an imbalance in your body between free radicals (those nasty unstable molecules that contribute to disease and aging) and antioxidants. This imbalance prevents antioxidants from counteracting the damaging effects of free radicals. Studies suggest oxidative stress also has a hand in the aging process of hair follicles. 9. Werner syndromeThis rare, progressive hereditary condition causes accelerated aging, including hair loss and/or white hair by age 25. 10. Harsh hair productsA little research on your go-to hair products (dyes, shampoos, etc.) may go a long way. Many shampoos contain harsh chemicals that may not be doing your hair any favors and may even decrease melanin. Plus, we all know that constantly bleaching and dyeing hair isn't good for it. Hydrogen peroxide is one chemical in particular that has been shown to prompt the damaging effects of oxidative stress on hair. White locks, premature or not, are usually a done deal. Once your hair starts to go white, it's highly unlikely it can be reversed, because the melanin that created hair color in those follicles is already gone. Effective prevention depends on the cause. If it's genetics, there's no "off" switch. If you feel like your premature white hair isn't genetic and may be due to a health condition, check in with your doctor. Treating a vitamin deficiency or another condition may help restore pigmentation, but it's not guaranteed. However, treating certain health conditions can help prevent early white hairs in the first place. Have your thyroid checked! With thyroid conditions, repigmentation may be possible after hormone therapy treatment. Consult your doc if you think your thyroid is to blame. Get more B-12If you have low vitamin B-12 levels, upping this essential vitamin may improve your hair follicles and bring your natural hair color back to life. If you're diagnosed with a B-12 deficiency, your doctor may also suggest getting injections or adding foods high in B-12 to your diet. Don't forget vitamins B-6, D, and E and biotin! A 2015 study found that several nutritional deficiencies affect pigmentation and suggested that vitamin supplements or dietary changes could help bring color back. Get your essential mineralsZinc, iron, magnesium, selenium, and copper are also super important for hair health. Copper, especially, is often overlooked, and research has found that low levels of copper can lead to gray hair. Combat oxidative stress through your dietAdding foods to your fridge that are brimming with antioxidants can help reduce oxidative stress. Gooseberry is a tiny, nutritious fruit known for its high antioxidant content that can help battle oxidative stress. Catalase is another powerful antioxidant that has been shown to prevent gray and white hairs. You can find catalase in garlic, kale, sweet potatoes, cabbage, broccoli, and almonds. Stop smoking and try to limit stressThere's no evidence your natural hair color will come back if you quit the cigs or find more zen. But stopping these behaviors entirely can help prevent more white hairs. Be nicer to your hairStop washing your hair so often (seriously — here's an excuse not to shower every day). Overwashing your hair can actually damage it. And be mindful of the products you use to wash, dye, and style your hair. Bleaching and harsh shampoos can lead to damage and early white hairs. If an underlying condition, lifestyle factor, or vitamin deficiency isn't the reason you're sporting a snowy-haired look, what are your options? Here are some more "natural" remedies that can cover your white strands — although they're not all backed by science. Curry leavesThis centuries-old remedy may help prevent premature graying. You can pick up these leaves online or at Indian grocery stores. Just combine the leaves with oil and apply the mixture to your scalp to help your hair hang on to pigment. Bhringraj oilAlso known as "false daisy," this oil is a superstar in India, famous for its health benefits. Research shows bhringraj oil can darken hair and stop it from going white early. Fo-tiResearch has shown that fo-ti, a plant used in traditional Chinese medicine, can help prevent graying of hair (among other anti-aging effects) when taken as a supplement. Some people also believe it can restore pigment. But it requires patience — it can take months to show its hair color-related benefits. Black teaThere's no clinical research on this one, but black tea is a go-to for making hair not only darker but also softer and shinier. Boil three to five tea bags in 2 cups of water, and then let it cool. Apply it to wet, clean hair or mix it with a conditioner, and leave it on for an hour before rinsing. There's no one-size-fits-all approach to dealing with premature white hair. Do you feel like rocking your new, natural look? Would you rather see it go? Maybe your white hair is genetic and all the preventive measures on the planet can't stop it. Should you dye it? Consistently covering your white hairs can be time-consuming (and a drain on your wallet), but dyeing it might make you feel better about your hair. It's your hair and your choice. And guess what? You're allowed to change your mind. Wear your choice with confidence and you can't lose.

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