



•  
*Blondes  
are the  
hair-hue  
minority.*



→ Our hair is our most noticeable trait—and we obsess over it accordingly. But even though we spend lots of time enhancing and re-enhancing our tresses, we probably haven't considered something pretty cool: What's underneath all the glosses and highlights can be a health barometer of sorts.

### **If You're a Blonde...**

#### **...PROTECT YOUR PEEPER**

Women have a higher risk than men of developing age-related macular degeneration (AMD), an eye condition that can cause blindness. And fair-haired females are especially prone to AMD, says Svetlana Kogan, M.D., founder of Doctors at Trump Place in New York City. A diet rich in the natural compounds lutein and zeaxanthin—found in kale, spinach, and snow peas—can help fend it off. Kogan suggests munching on one cup of the green veggies every day.

#### **...COVER UP**

Melanin gives skin its color and helps shield it from harmful UV rays, says dermatologist Joel Schlessinger, M.D., president emeritus of the American Society of Cosmetic Dermatology and Aesthetic Surgery. Thing is, blondes produce less of the stuff, which leaves their skin (and especially their scalps) at a higher risk for melanoma. Buy a full-spectrum SPF 30 sunscreen that shields against harmful UVA and UVB rays. And don't neglect your head: "Blondes should always wear a hat when they're in direct sunlight," says Schlessinger.

# *The* **Root** of Health

Oddly enough, your natural hair color offers surprising insights into your mental and physical well-being.

*By Gina Roberts-Grey*

## If You're a Brunette...

### ...HOLD ON TO YOUR HAIR

More than half of the 30 million American women with visible hair loss are brunettes. That could be because they have less hair to begin with: "Brown tresses are generally coarser and thicker than blonde or red strands, and your body produces fewer of them," Schlessinger says. So when brown hair follicles die, they leave behind more noticeable thin patches. Stave off sparse coverage by eating right. Low iron can contribute to hair loss, so start swallowing 18 milligrams a day; one cup of fortified oatmeal will provide your daily fill.

### ...STUB OUT THAT BUTT

Your chestnut mane is the result of lots of melanin, which could fast-track your dependency on nicotine. The reason: Melanin prevents your liver from quickly

metabolizing the drug, and the longer it's in your system, the faster you become hooked. Animal studies suggest that vitamin C helps keep your liver in top shape. Swallow 75 milligrams a day in the form of half a cup of red peppers or a medium-size orange. Your best bet, though, is never to pick up a cancer stick. Period.

### ...SNAG A BOYFRIEND

Do gentlemen really prefer blondes? Nope, according to Florida State University research. Not when it comes to long-term relationships. Plus, according to a 3,000-person survey, men prefer brunettes as serious mates because they see them as more reliable and steady. If you're not looking for a long-term thing, try a little spontaneity: Make the first move by slipping that cute guy your digits.

## If You're a Redhead...

### ...WATCH YOUR MOUTH!

The next time Lindsay Lohan goes in for a cavity filling, she might want to ask for extra Novocain. Fiery locks, it turns out, stem from an inherited DNA mutation that also makes redheads resistant to general and local anesthetics, says Daniel Sessler, M.D., an anesthesiologist at the Cleveland Clinic. In fact, carrot tops may need up to 20 percent more numbing juice than blondes or brunettes.

But don't let a little hurt keep you from getting good oral

*The fiery-locked get lots of lovin'.*



*Brunettes "look" trustworthy.*

care: Talk to your dentist about pain management prior to plopping down in her chair, or take 500 milligrams of ibuprofen one hour before the appointment.

### ...LOOK OUT FOR PARKINSON'S

A recent Harvard study found that redheads have an almost 90 percent greater chance of developing the disease. Why? Possibly because of that same gene mutation: It influences another type of gene that, when also mutated, can be associated with Parkinson's. On the plus side, research shows that folic acid might delay the progression of the illness. Margaret Lewin, M.D., medical director of Cinergy Health, advises taking 400 micrograms a day (more if you're pregnant). A multivitamin has all the folic acid most women need.

### ...STOCK UP ON CONDOMS

Redheads make red-hot lovers, or so the stereotype goes. One thing's for sure: They get a lot more action, according to one study. This might be due to a self-fulfilling prophecy, says Kogan. "Red is associated with fire, and fire is associated with passion," she says. "Often, you become what people expect of you." Something others are eager to try: Recent Clairol research shows nearly 40 percent of people said they'd go scarlet for a day if they could. ■

# Q & A

## THE DOCTOR IS IN

• BRUNILDA NAZARIO, M.D.  
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### My knees ache when it rains, but I'm only in my twenties. What's up?

—Ashley Z., Newburyport, MA

Don't worry, you're not on a geriatric fast track: It's normal for joints of all ages to throb when the weather changes. Most docs believe a drop in barometric pressure—what happens before a downpour—can cause joints to swell, which leads to stiff and sore knees. There's no evidence this does permanent damage; symptoms should disappear once the sun comes out. In the meantime, take an over-the-counter pain reliever or press a soothing hot pack against your knees.

### My sex drive has been decreasing for the two years I've been on the Pill. Are they related?

—Caroline C., Fresno, CA

Popping the Pill has many great advantages—including a lowered risk of ovarian cancer, less intense cramps, and a sultrier bust. But for some women, it can also be somewhat of a buzz kill. Oral contraceptives prevent pregnancy by signaling your brain to shut down your ovaries and can reduce your sex hormone production, leaving you decidedly *out of the mood*. Have a very frank talk with your partner and your M.D. about your options, which include nonhormonal birth-control methods, such as condoms or the copper IUD.

### Ask the Expert

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