

Science Of Stress

Dermatologists Detail The Scary Signs Of Stress Revealed By Skin

April 1, 2008 — Dermatologists know that stress can cause hair to fall out, acne to break out, and many other problems. These manifestations of stress can cause even more anxiety. Stress causes cortisol levels to increase within the body, which increases oil production, which causes acne breakouts. Getting more exercise, obtaining proper rest, and caring for skin are three basic steps to counteract these problems.

'I swear, my kids are giving me gray hairs! And I'm cursed! I always get a pimple on my nose before a party!' Is it all in your head? Maybe not! There actually may be some science to those old wives tales.

Ever notice how you always get a pimple before a big date? It's not a coincidence! Dermatologists have found when you're stressed out, your body releases a hormone called cortisol.

"When cortisol levels increase, oil production increases and sometimes that will cause acne in patients that have never even had acne before," Flor Mayoral, M.D., a dermatologist in South Miami, Fla., told *Ivanhoe*.

As if acne wasn't bad enough, stress can cause your hair to fall out too! "When people are stressed out, your body also responds by taking a time out, and we really do not need hair," Dr. Mayoral explains.

Men and women can develop alopecia -- bald spots of hair in the beard or scalp -- when they're under stress.

Nervous habits like twirling your hair can also pull hairs out, causing bald spots.

"And then when the hair grows back, sometimes it grows in as gray hairs," Dr. Mayoral says. So it's true *ý* stress does cause gray hairs! Another nervous habit can turn ugly *ý*

"When they're not thinking about it, they are picking at their nail and they actually damage the growth plate of the nail and the nail grows in with a ridge in the middle of it," Dr. Mayoral says.

Stay ahead of stress by taking better care of yourself during tough or hectic times. "Sometimes people meditate to help them deal with stress," Dr. Mayoral says. "Exercising is a wonderful way to deal with stress. It releases endorphins *ý* it helps people relax."

Also, avoid hot showers and use detergent-free soap. See your dermatologist if the condition persists, but don't get stressed! After all, that will only make it worse!

Dr. mayoral says when adults suddenly develop acne, it is usually in response to stress. Physical stress like disease, injury or pregnancy, can also cause these stress-related hair and skin reactions.

STRESS AND SKIN: Stress stimulates the body to release a hormone called cortisol, which promotes the release of oil by the skin. This increase in oil is what encourages acne to develop. Ways to help minimize the effect of stress on skin include avoiding extra hot showers, applying moisturizer after bathing, and using sunscreen.

STRESS-REDUCING TIPS: There are some easy, practical things humans can do to reduce the amount of stress in their lives. (1) Be realistic and don't try to be perfect, or expect others to be so. (2) Don't over-schedule; cut out an activity or two when you start to feel overwhelmed. (3) Get a good night's sleep. (4) Get regular exercise to manage stress -- just not excessive or compulsive exercise -- and follow a healthy diet. (5) Learn to relax by building time into your schedule for reading or a nice long bath.