

HEALTH

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TCM: hairy problem

I have a greasy, scaly scalp. I can't stop scratching it and lately, I've begun to lose hair too.

Do you have oily skin? Are there red scaly patches on your eyebrows, the sides of your nose or behind your ears? If yes, you might have scalp seborrhea, a common cause of dandruff.

Seborrhea is a chronic inflammatory skin disorder that tends to attack oily or greasy areas of the body. The scalp is the most popular site, causing scaly, itchy, red patches and stubborn dandruff. Factors that make you more susceptible include stress, fatigue, extreme weather, infrequent shampooing and a poor diet. You may experience flare-ups from time to time.

A little patience and persistence can greatly improve the condition of your scalp. Daily cleansing to remove oils plays a key role, so try medicated shampoos to find the one that works best and then rotate between medicated and non-medicated shampoos.

Remember to massage the shampoo onto the scalp then leave it in place for five minutes before rinsing. If this

doesn't work, or your scalp gets crusty, red or painful, see your doctor.

In traditional Chinese medicine, inflammation of the scalp is treated by eliminating pathogens and improving blood circulation. TCM physicians use internal and external methods depending on the condition's severity.

Dry, powdery dandruff and an itchy scalp with a pink or yellow-red rash are associated with blood deficiency and the irritation of wind and heat pathogens. Herbs such as schizonepeta herb, ledebouriella root and great burdock fruit can eliminate the pathogens while angelica root, rehmannia root and gypsum help to improve blood circulation in the region.

When the scalp is very itchy or painful, and forms a large red rash, the dandruff is greasy and thick. Herbs such as wormwood herb, gardenia fruit and oriental water-plantain rhizome are used to eliminate the damp-heat pathogens. Spreading hedyotis and hawthorn fruit are prescribed to reduce sebum secretions.

If the skin rash becomes chronic and there is hair loss, fleecflower root, black sesame and yerbadetajo herb can be used to nourish the scalp. Peony root, astragalus root and Sichuan lovage

are for improving a sluggish blood flow.

External remedies can work directly on the scalp to control dandruff, itchiness and hair loss. Herbal washes, creams or tinctures are available. For example, decoct garden balsam stem (30 grams), honeylocust spine (15 grams) and arborvitae leafy-twig (30 grams) into a 1,500ml solution and use three times weekly.

You should also pay attention to risk factors. Maintain a balance between work and rest, minimise stress, avoid harsh detergents or styling products, get a little sun to temper the irritated scalp and don't scratch.

Avoid smoking, alcohol and greasy and sweet food as they promote secretions from the skin. Eating foods such as wax ground, hawthorn fruit, coix seed, Chinese radish, black sesame and soy beans can prove beneficial. This recipe might help: prepare 20 grams each of wolfberry, chrysanthemum, hawthorn fruit and lotus leaf; make a tea and drink it daily.

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