

BEAUTY

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It may take months to grow out a short hairstyle, but flowing locks can be yours in a matter of hours, writes Camilla Chafer

Tress relief



PHOTO: CORBIS

CELEBRITY WATCHERS are no strangers to the vagaries of hairstyle trends. One day, an actress or singer will be photographed sporting a short cut, the next she'll have long, flowing locks. Now, mere mortals can also cheat their way to thicker and longer hair in just a few hours, thanks to extensions.

Hair stylist Emma Green of Angel Emma and stylists from the Mark Glenn Salon – both in London – offer this advice for those thinking about getting them:

Why have extensions?

Extensions don't just add length – they can also give volume and texture, and introduce colour without messy bleaching and dyeing, Green says. Braids and dreadlocks can also be added using similar methods.

How do the extensions work?

You need at least 10cm of hair to secure the extensions. There are various ways to attach them, depending on your hair type. "If you decide on the wrong type of hair [extension] or use an unsuitable method of attaching it, then you won't achieve the look you were after and you could seriously damage your hair," according to website virtualhair.com.

The most popular attaching style is the glued-in method, in which a small bond of glue is used on the tip of the extension to secure it to your hair. Other methods include micro-braids, where a tiny four-way braid at the root of your hair locks in the extensions and is secured with thread or glue.

In Europe, hairstylists also use micro-rings, which are secured around the extension and existing hair and then clamped. Similarly, hairstylists in the US use so-called shrinkies – tiny, translucent plastic tubes that are heated with a clamp to create a tight seal.

Extensions for African-American hair are usually attached by braiding the existing hair close to the scalp and then sewing a tract of hair into the braid, in a method called a weave.

After the extensions have been attached, they should look seamless because your own hair will cover the bonds and they can then be cut into the hairstyle you want.

How long do they last?

If they've been attached properly, extensions stay in for up to three months and you can return for top-ups if any come loose. "I have my clients come back for a six-week maintenance check and replace any that may have come out or put in new ones," says Green.

She recommends removing the extensions after about 14 weeks. Dead hair that has fallen out at the roots but is still held by the extension bond will start to tangle and could damage your hair if not removed.

Some people choose to put in

extensions to create a one-off look or for just one to two weeks.

Where does the hair come from?

People. Untreated human hair is cut, then chemically treated and dyed before being sold to hair merchants. It can be dyed and styled exactly like your own hair.

Different grades are available. The most common and cheaper variety is of Indian and Chinese origin. The most expensive variety is Remy hair from Europe, which has a fine texture and is easy to style.



Victoria Beckham spiced up her look with extensions. PHOTO: AFP

Synthetic hair, made from plastic fibres, is cheaper, but can't be intensively heat styled. However, it's lighter than human hair extensions. One of the most popular varieties is Prostyles, which comes in natural as well as party colours.

Does it damage your hair?

No. There have been reports that extensions pull out existing hair by the root or that your hair is left thinner and weaker after extensions, but your hair only appears thinner after they're removed, because you're used to the feel of more hair.

Hair will only be pulled out if a stylist attaches extensions that are too heavy for your natural hair to support. "If a client is nervous, it's a good idea to have streaks [of extensions] first," says Green. "This gives them a chance to see how they like the feeling of the bonds as well as having the extra hair. They can also see how to wash and style it before taking the plunge with a full head."

Can extensions be used to disguise hair loss?

Extensions are sometimes used by those with alopecia (hair loss, often as a result of stress or trauma), trichotillomania (repeated hair pulling) and damage (poor hair care, from an accident or as a side effect of medical care).

The extensions will give the appearance of real hair while natural hair grows back. "We have clients who've been using our system for years, with colleagues and friends being completely oblivious to the fact that the hair isn't entirely their own," says the Mark Glenn Salon.

Do extensions involve extra care?

No, but it helps to use an oil-free shampoo and a good-quality, thick conditioner. "Don't rub extensions together while washing and never condition the root area, only the mid-lengths and ends of the hair," says Green.

"Doing sport is fine, but the scalp can get oily quicker, so hair should be washed afterwards."

Using a hairdryer, curlers or tongs on cool settings is fine, although straighteners and other tools that give off intense heat aren't suitable. Besides that bit of extra care, just treat extensions as if they're your natural hair.

Can I do it at home?

This is one beauty treatment best left to the professionals.

The cost

At the Hairdressers in Central, it

costs up to \$7,000 for a full head of hair. A half-head costs \$2,500 to \$4,500, but they need to do a consultation first.

HippFish in SoHo charges \$200 for a minimum of five extensions for colour or highlights. Ten cost \$400 and so on. If you're adding length, volume and colour, it can

be about \$2,000. "If you want to look like Victoria Beckham", it'll cost you about \$3,000, the salon says. At the Aveda Salon in Central, a strand of fake hair can cost as little as \$50, but a full head is \$3,000 to \$4,000. A salon spokesman says you don't necessarily need a lot of extensions to achieve a full-head

look. A full head can take up to four hours to apply.

Where can I find a good hair extension specialist?

Word of mouth is often the best bet. If you have friends with extensions, look at what bonds were used and ask their opinion of the hairdresser.

EXTENSIONS TO DYE FOR

Emmie, 27, an administrator from London, resorted to extensions after a minor hair disaster nine months ago.

"My hair was shoulder length and dyed black for many years," says Emmie (not her real name). "I decided to go back to a natural look and used a cheap bleach to get rid of the black, losing a lot of hair in the process."

"It ended up two inches [5cm] long at the back and four at the front. It was also brittle and gingery. After correcting the colour to platinum blonde, I had Prostyles extensions installed in shades of blonde and white and had them cut into a shoulder-length layered style," she says.

"The extensions make me feel glamorous and more comfortable with my look. I don't like having short hair, and my natural hair is taking a long time to grow back, so the extensions add volume and length without me having to wait."

Now that she has extensions, Emmie says her hair is easier to manage, thicker, longer and more versatile. On the downside, she has to take care of them to ensure they look their best.

"When I first got them done, the extension seals were kind of painful to sleep on and your scalp itches under the seals for a bit, but they settle in eventually," she says.

However, Emmie warns that they're addictive.

"I feel underdressed without them and when I give my natural hair a rest, I'm counting the days until I can put them back in."

Presswire Media

Ask your hairdresser if anyone in the salon wears extensions and check theirs, too. If there are large bonds, steer clear because these could cause damage.

Ask about the quality of hair they use, too, because prices and grades of hair vary considerably.

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UPCLOSE

Suzanne Harrison

StriVectin-SD

What is it?

StriVectin-SD is a cream designed to eradicate stretch marks, but it's now being promoted especially as a wrinkle buster and the maker boasts that it's "better than Botox". US and European women reportedly lather it on from head to toe.

How did it morph into a face cream?

Supposedly, a relative of an employee accidentally applied the cream to her face (they get samples without instructions) and noticed an improvement in her skin texture. But manufacturer Klein-Becker says it always knew the cream had the potential to smooth crows feet and face wrinkles. Louis Rinaldi, managing director of product acquisitions, says trials were already being conducted before the story about

the relative gained currency. "The ingredients repair and replenish the molecules that make skin healthy and young."

Tests showed that the cream also thickened skin 1.6 times faster than retinol, without irritation or sun sensitivity.

What's so good about it?

The cream contains three botanical ingredients, Rinaldi says. One duplicates the natural amino acid found under the skin that promotes the production

of collagen, a protein used by skin, tendon, bone, cartilage and connective tissue.

How popular is it?

StriVectin-SD is now sold in 24 countries. In the US, it's available from about 4,000 stores. In France, sales are expected to reach US\$65 million this year.

How do I use it?

Smear it on stretch marks or apply a small amount to the face, twice a day. You can use a moisturiser as well. Rinaldi says you should see a difference in 28 days.

What do Hong Kong women say?

Karen Page, 33, says she started using it on her face about eight months ago. "My skin gets clogged and is bumpy. Since using the cream, I've noticed ... it's much smoother and looks better."

How much is it, and where can I get it?

The 6oz pack costs \$1,550 and a new 1.3oz eye cream costs \$650. Available from Harvey Nichols and Lane Crawford.

