



DERMATOLOGISTS WARN CERAMIC FLAT IRONS COULD DAMAGE HAIR AND LEAD TO HAIR BREAKAGE

Straight hair enthusiasts urged to give their hair a break by limiting use and avoiding improper application of popular hair device

CHICAGO (July 30, 2008) – While hairstyles come and go, pin-straight hair favored by A-list celebrities and emulated by scores of loyal fans from coast to coast appears to have real staying power. That’s why the use of flat irons, which are used to straighten hair, has increased in popularity in recent years. Now, dermatologists warn that some flat irons can damage hair and cause hair breakage which could put a crimp in this coveted hairstyle.

At the American Academy of Dermatology’s Summer Academy Meeting 2008 in Chicago, dermatologist Paradi Mirmirani, MD, FAAD, assistant clinical professor of dermatology, University of California, San Francisco, presented evidence that when ceramic flat irons are used improperly or too frequently, hair breakage can occur.

“The newer flat irons that have a ceramic coating instead of a metal one are marketed as providing more rapid and uniform heat transmission. While this allows for quicker straightening of the hair with less damage, it is really a classic case of buyer beware,” said Dr. Mirmirani. “We’re seeing that when these ceramic flat irons are used at the highest heat settings and on a daily basis to achieve straight hair, they can really take a toll on the structure of the hair and cause very noticeable problems that can be hard to repair.”

Temporary hair straightening using a flat iron is achieved by applying heated tongs to the length of the hair. This heat breaks and then reforms the hydrogen bonds in the inner core of the hair fiber. Dr. Mirmirani noted that while the goal of straightening is to alter the inner substance of the hair, the unwanted consequence may be damage to the outer protective cuticle, causing weathering, damage and eventual hair breakage.

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Hair weathering or damage is usually characterized by dry ends or flyaway hair. However, if breakage occurs, it can happen anywhere along the length of the hair and cause a shaggy or skimpy appearance to the hair. When this occurs, flat iron users may use the device even more frequently to try to tame the broken or uneven appearance of their hair – which can lead to more damage.

Today, many ceramic flat irons on the market have variable heat settings with maximum temperatures of up to 410 degrees Fahrenheit (210 degrees Celsius). Prior studies have shown that temperatures of 347 to 419 degrees Fahrenheit (175 to 215 degrees Celsius) for as little as five minutes are enough to damage most hair. However, Dr. Mirmirani warns this threshold may be even lower if the heat is applied to damp hair or hair that has been chemically treated with color or permanents, as she is seeing patients who fit this scenario more frequently. If women are not willing to give up their flat irons in the quest for straight hair, Dr. Mirmirani advised them to take precautions.

“Proper use of flat irons is extremely important, especially given how quickly hair can be damaged with high heat settings,” said Dr. Mirmirani. “Flat irons should only be applied to dry hair, and specialized styling products that act as heat protectors may be applied to the hair prior to pressing to help prevent burning and allow for smoother hair that remains straight longer. If there is a temperature setting on the device, it should be set no higher than 347 degrees Fahrenheit, or 175 degrees Celsius, or on the low/medium setting.”

Although how frequently a flat iron should be used depends on an individual’s hair type, Dr. Mirmirani recommended that these devices should probably not be used more than two to three times per week. For those who won’t leave home without the ultra straight look, Dr. Mirmirani acknowledged that forgoing the daily flat iron routine will take willpower – but the end result will be healthier, stronger hair that is not as prone to breakage and will look better in the long run.

Dr. Mirmirani added that for many women and young girls, flat irons are not the only source of hair damage. “Improper hair care is a common cause of hair loss, and excessive or improper use of devices, such as flat irons, is only

one piece of the puzzle,” she said. “In fact, many of the styling products that women routinely use – including hair dyes, perms and relaxers – can all cause hair breakage. Pairing these products with the regular use of a flat iron to straighten hair could exacerbate hair breakage and cause lasting damage if left untreated.”

Treatment of damaged or broken hair includes avoiding any heat or chemicals, cutting the damaged hair, and minimizing friction to the hair. Because it does not affect normal hair growth, most hair loss from breakage is temporary. Once hair is sufficiently damaged, it may take up to two years to be fully repaired. For successful diagnosis and treatment of hair damage, including hair loss, see your dermatologist.

Headquartered in Schaumburg, Ill., the American Academy of Dermatology (Academy), founded in 1938, is the largest, most influential, and most representative of all dermatologic associations. With a membership of more than 15,000 physicians worldwide, the Academy is committed to: advancing the diagnosis and medical, surgical and cosmetic treatment of the skin, hair and nails; advocating high standards in clinical practice, education, and research in dermatology; and supporting and enhancing patient care for a lifetime of healthier skin, hair and nails. For more information, contact the Academy at 1-888-462-DERM (3376) or www.aad.org.

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