

The Hairgrip

BBC Radio Hereford and Worcester on air question.: Have we been using hairgrips incorrectly?

It was suggested in an article that over the years people have used the hairgrip (hairpin) incorrectly. It was said that, while most people use them with the flat side to the scalp, it should be with the corrugated side to the scalp.

So how should you use a hairgrip?

The hairgrip is generally made from a flexible plastic-coated wire, which is folded in half and has a corrugated side. Contrary to the suggestion, this should be uppermost and the smooth side should be flat on the surface of the scalp.

The hairgrip should slide into position with ease. If the hairgrip is used incorrectly it will not slide so easily and can feel uncomfortable and painful for the wearer.

The hairgrip, also known as hairpin, has a very long history, as far back as the 3rd millennium BC. There is evidence from carved figurines showing elaborate hair styles which would require hairpins. In some cultures, men are also depicted with elaborate hairstyles, suggesting that they also used some form of hair grip.

Archaeologists over the years have found many examples of different styles of hairpins, made from different materials. Some hairpins were made from precious materials, such as gold and silver but bronze, ivory and wood were also used.. Most of the wooden hairpins which have survived were delicately carved. The hairpins presumably for the more well off would be embellished and encrusted with diamonds, rubies, emeralds and other precious stones. The hairpin has been a very important part of many cultures but, as it would be the most well off who had the leisure to have their hair elaborately styled, so too they would have had the greatest use of hair pins.

In ancient China the wearing of a hairpin denoted the passage of a young girl into adulthood. Prior to her coming of age at 15, her hair would have been worn in pigtails. After this, hair would be worn up and styled, required the hair pin

In more modern times, hairpins have become readily and cheaply available to everyone due to mass production. They are mostly metal and come in a variety of colours and sizes. They may have a shiny or matt finish, the latter being preferred for stage, film and TV work, because they do not reflect bright lights. In modern hair grips, the two ends of the prongs are guarded by a plastic covering which resembles a small blob, protecting the scalp from what would otherwise be sharp ends. The blobs also make the opening of the grip easier.

A final point : if in the USA and shopping for hair pins, you would ask for Bobby Pins, while in the UK they are now commonly referred to as Kirby Grips, as the manufacturers Kirby, Beard and Co took out a patent early in the last century on what is now the most popular style.

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