

Carol Walker opens the door to her world of trichology in her series of columns in *SalonFocus*



Walker's World

Clients with psoriasis of the scalp need hairdressers who are sensitive and understanding, says Carol Walker

Psoriasis is a common condition characterised by a rapid division of thickened silvery scales of skin covering patches of inflamed, red skin.

Faulty enzyme systems in the granular layer of the epidermis that result in the abnormal formation of a protein called keratin cause this condition.



Psoriasis can be both painful and unsightly

Dead cells are shed in the normal wear and tear of daily living and are replaced by cells from the layer beneath in healthy skin.

With psoriasis, these cells build up to give the appearance of oval or circular patches of silvery scales, which are thicker and larger than the normal scales that we would shed. The scales become hard because of the loss of moisture.

An increase in the number and size of the capillaries in the area means the underlying area of skin is red. If the scales are removed, small bleeding points can be seen although there is no weeping.

SALON IMPLICATIONS

It has been noticed that when clients with psoriasis undergo perming, the layers of skin which build up in patches are removed during the procedure.

Hair colour should also be used only if the skin is not abraded but it is important the scalp is examined closely and the manufacturer's instructions are adhered to.

If the client informs you of any adverse reactions or discomfort, the process must be stopped immediately. However, if you are in any doubt, then you must refer your client to their GP or dermatologist.

You should ask if a client is on medication, ask to see the medication literature or refer them back to their doctor.

You will also need to examine the scalp, neck and forehead thoroughly before any salon service is given, even after medical permission has been granted by the client's doctor just in case the skin is abraded.

Hairdressers should feel confident that they understand the condition and not feel wary of clients who present with the problem but give them confidence they are in safe and sympathetic hands.

INHERITED

Psoriasis tends to be inherited and it might first appear between the ages of 10-16, and flare up periodically.

The condition improves during pregnancy which could be down to the change in hormones but will deteriorate again following the birth.

Psoriasis has not been connected with allergies and it is not contagious. Stress plays an important part in its onset and symptoms might improve or deteriorate as the sufferer is more, or less, relaxed.

A person who is highly stressed will improve noticeably on holiday with the reduction of stress and increase of sunlight which also has a beneficial effect.

Walking in and out of a central heated room into the cold will adversely affect the overall condition.

TREATMENTS

There is no cure. The treatments offered by registered trichologists through the Institute of Trichologists can remove this build-up of scale using keratolytic creams which range from salicylic acid for mild condition and coal tar for more severe cases.

These keratolytics, along with other trichological procedures, become the only way of removing the build up of congealed scale of skin that coats and blocks the hair follicle.

It is not uncommon once the surface of the skin is cleaned for new hair growth to occur but it must be remembered that this is a treatment and not a cure therefore it will require top-up treatments to suit the individual's own needs.

Vitamins and minerals that play a part in the improvement of this condition are Vitamins C, B complex and E, together with Evening Primrose Oil, as well as zinc and selenium.

Mild psoriasis may be helped by moderate exposure to an ultraviolet lamp as well as sunlight – also known as phototherapy.

Emollient creams help reduce scaling and improve the appearance of the skin.

Moderate attacks are usually treated with an ointment containing coal tar or dithranol.

Diet can play an important role, such as the exclusion of alcohol, coffee, red meat and all food additives.

These exclusions have all produced real improvements in psoriasis sufferers who have tried this.