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Fighting the Flakes

Dandruff shampoos mild, effective

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San Francisco — Although dandruff and anti-dandruff shampoos have been around for years, there is new information to share with patients that will help them fight the flakes. Roberta Boyd, associate director of scalp care and anti-dandruff technology at Procter & Gamble, and associates outlined the latest developments in anti-dandruff shampoos and hair health in a poster presentation at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Dermatology.

The first piece of news patients will be glad to hear is that certain anti-dandruff shampoos can be just as mild as cosmetic shampoos yet still be effective. The second piece of news is a warning of how damaging just a little scalp scratching can be to long-term hair health.

Mild But Effective

The misconception may still exist that all anti-dandruff shampoos are harsh and have to be in order to be effective. Some anti-dandruff products introduced last year are mild yet effective against dandruff. The key to a mild anti-dandruff shampoo is pyrithione zinc as the active ingredient. So patients need to read labels.

"Because pyrithione zinc is a fairly innocuous white particle, it doesn't interact a lot with the shampoo chassis. It can leave the rest of the formula like a cosmetic shampoo," Boyd said.

Pyrithione zinc is a preferred ingredient over the three other formulations commonly used in anti-dandruff shampoos. It leaves hair in better shape and formulates into a better shampoo than ketoconazole. It makes for a more stable liquid form than selenium disulfide. It does not have the strong odor or hair-damaging effects that coal tar does.

The poster findings are the result of comparison testing on hair samples treated with anti-dandruff shampoos and cosmetic shampoos. In the test, measures were taken of the force required to detangle hair after

shampooing. The more force required to detangle is an indication of damage to the hair.

Results show anti-dandruff shampoos that included pyrithione zinc did not roughen the hair cuticle, did not trap the comb, and provided adequate lubrication, all of which left the hair in good condition.

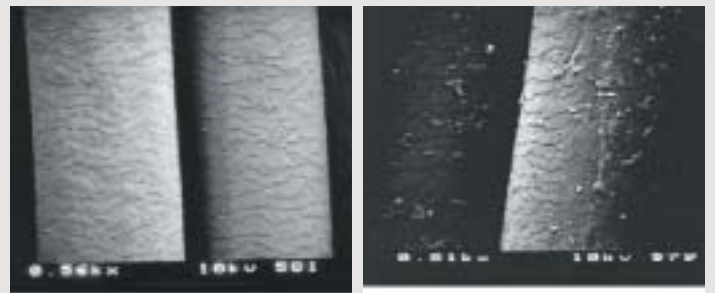
"There is no longer a tradeoff between anti-dandruff efficacy and cosmetic benefits for beautiful hair," Boyd said.

These results may surprise some who are only familiar with the harsh dandruff shampoos that were not recommended for everyday use. In fact, daily use is something patients may not be doing with their anti-dandruff shampoo. But they should be instructed to use a pyrithione zinc anti-dandruff shampoo every day to achieve maximum efficacy.

Boyd explained the frequency of use outlined in the FDA monograph for anti-dandruff shampoos is worded "at least" a few times per week. She said some clinicians and patients have interpreted that to mean two to three times per week is the most they should use an anti-dandruff shampoo. Because dandruff can be a lifelong condition, daily use is best.

The mildness of pyrithione zinc formulations can improve patient compliance, she said. A patient is more likely to use an anti-dandruff product regularly if it leaves hair healthy and soft. And he or she is more likely to try such a new product if it has been recommended by the dermatologist.

However, some dermatologists may hesitate to recommend what they think is a harsh, not very fragrant anti-dandruff shampoo that the patient will eventually complain about and stop using. That need not be the case with a pyrithione zinc formulation.



Magnified hair shaft at scalp of dandruff patient shown at baseline (left) and five minutes after scratching. (Photograph courtesy of Roberta Boyd.)

"We think dermatologists will have a higher comfort level in making these recommendations, knowing patients will be more pleased with their hair condition," said Lauren Thaman-Hodges, a scientist from Procter & Gamble.

Little Itch Goes Long Way

Of course, the itch that accompanies dandruff must also be treated, and anti-dandruff shampoos have been addressing that problem for years. However, such an itch appears to have more serious implications and have more damaging effects than previously thought.

Boyd and colleagues examined the hair shaft at the scalp of dandruff patients using a scanning electron microscope at 400X magnification. What they saw was shockingly surprising.

Where a dandruff patient had scratched the hair and scalp, there was evidence of fingernail marks imbedded into the hair fiber. There were indentations within the hair fiber that indicated the back and forth movement of scratching with fingernails. And the damage could not be corrected with anti-dandruff shampoos and did not resolve itself as the hair grew.

"With just a little scratching, you damage hair at the root. It never recovers as it grows out," Boyd said.

Treating the itch associated with dandruff is nothing new, but the damaging effects of scratching are newsworthy. It's something that can be addressed with the milder pyrithione zinc anti-dandruff shampoo formulas that help patients fight the flakes and give them healthy hair once again.