

d Item - Bubble Hair

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Abstract: Doctor's resource on Bubble Hair

Key points

An acquired hair shaft defect in which air bubbles form inside the hair. The bubbles are produced by heating wet hair sufficiently to cause any water that has seeped into the cortex to boil and produce steam.

Definition

Bubble hair is an acquired, localised, reversible, hair shaft defect characterised by air bubbles within the hairs.

Epidemiology

Relatively common among woman who use heated tongs and curling devices in their hair.

Aetiology

Overheating moist hairs produces air bubbles within the cortex.

Pathogenesis

It is thought that water seeps into the hair cortex and boils when heated with the curling tongs. Curling tongs may generate temperatures in excess of 180°C. The steam thus generated produces the bubbles. The bubbles in the hair can be focal or diffuse. The hair is weakened at the sites of the bubbles and may break.

Clinical features

Patients present with a focal area of brittle hair on the scalp. There is also a change in the texture of the involved hairs which have become straight and stiff. In affected areas the hair may fracture and come off in clumps.

Pathology

The air bubbles within the cortex that distort the entire appearance of the fibre are well seen on light microscopy.

Investigation

Light microscopy.

Differential Diagnosis

Bubble hair may clinically resemble acquired trichorrhexis nodosa, however the two conditions are easily distinguished by light microscopy.

Associated Features

Other coincidental features of weathering due to excessive treatment of the hair may be evident.

Prognosis

The condition is self-limiting if patients avoid further precipitating factors.

Treatment

Avoiding the use of curling tongs, especially on wet hair, may be sufficient. Hair dryers should not be used on the hottest setting in predisposed individuals.
