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IT'S HARD ENOUGH when hemlines suddenly drop six inches—at least all that requires is an afternoon of strategic shopping. But when last season's ubiquitous long bob is elbowed off the runways by Rapunzel-esque locks, a few hours spent with your credit card just won't do the trick. "There is something so ultrafeminine about long hair right now," says Mark Townsend, stylist to Nicole Kidman, Kerry Washington, and the Olsen trifecta (Mary-Kate, Ashley, and Elizabeth). "And women are convinced that men prefer it."

So what's a bobbed girl to do? "Your hair growth is largely genetically programmed, and while you can't change that, the right lifestyle can help you make the most of your genetics and affect how fast your hair grows," says Doris Day, a New York dermatologist. "By turning off or reducing the inflammation process—which can be caused by stress, diet, or over-processing, and can age the hair follicle—you create a strong foundation, nourish the scalp, and allow hair to grow to the best of its ability." For a one-two punch, treatments that reduce inflammation can be combined with targeted options, from at-home lasers to caffeine-laced shampoos, that promise to encourage faster hair growth by increasing circulation to the scalp. Consider them the follicular stepchildren of minoxidil (the active ingredient in Rogaine). Though researchers are not exactly sure how minoxidil works, studies have shown it effective in combating thinning.

"Hair grows on average about a centimeter [.39 inches] a month," says Paradi Mirmirani, a dermatologist in Vallejo, California, who specializes in hair disorders. "Hormones play a role—hair grows faster during pregnancy, and slows after age 40." To speed up the process, Day recommends a boot-camp approach. Her Hair Growth System (\$120) consists of a shampoo and conditioner as well as a serum with peptides and red clover extract to help reduce inflammation. "My patients use them with Rogaine and Viviscal supplements with a marine complex and biotin," she says.

Many of the glossiest girls in town, including Gwyneth Paltrow and Karlie Kloss, swear by Viviscal (\$49.99 for a 30-day supply). "I can't think of anyone not taking Viviscal," says Townsend. **Biotin is also a star ingredient in Dr. Frank Lipman's Be Well Hair, Skin & Nail**

LONGER LONGEST HAIR

LONGER LONGEST HAIR

*Spring's hottest lock looks
require a serious mane.
Emily Dudding brushes up on
the latest growth accelerators.*

Formula (\$39 for a 30-day supply), though the vitamin's efficacy remains controversial.

Day advises her patients to wait three months for results, and then, if necessary, up the ante with in-office laser treatments, which aim light waves at the scalp and may decrease inflammation and increase circulation (cost: \$3,000 for a three-month course of weekly sessions). Home laser treatments are now an option too, including the FDA-cleared HairMax Professional 12 LaserComb (\$545). It uses light energy to stimulate hair follicles, according to HairMax founder David Michaels. "HairMax helps extend the anagen [active] phase of the hair growth cycle, which allows for the hair to grow longer and may help it grow faster," he explains.

For scalp stimulation sans lasers, there's a slew of new shampoos and treatments. Topik's Hair Regrowth Treatment (\$25) contains 2 percent minoxidil, and is sprayed on the scalp twice daily. Alterna's Caviar Repair Lengthening Hair & Scalp Elixir (\$38) contains a tetrapeptide and a floral extract to reduce inflammation. Valmont Hair & Scalp Cellular Treatment (\$595) also uses a peptide to help anchor the hair follicle to the scalp and prolong the active growth phase. And Glossy Locks Grow More Shampoo (\$35) has caffeine, ginseng, and mint to jump-start circulation.

It's just as crucial to protect your hair from breakage caused by chemicals and overstyling. "Lay off the heat tools," recommends Harry Josh, Gisele's stylist of choice. "Even if you cut back one day a week, you'll notice a difference." Well-conditioned hair is less likely to snap as well. Redken's new Extreme Length Primer (\$22) and Extreme Length Sealer (\$24) with biotin are designed to fight breaking points from root to tip, and promise to preserve up to six inches of additional length.

The real secret to longer hair, though, doesn't require hyperactive follicles hopped up on caffeine. "Ninety percent of the women you see on the red carpet have extensions," Townsend admits. "Extensions are more accessible than ever. If you invest in one set, you can have them put in when you go for a blowout. I get all my hair from GarlandDrake.com." It seems an afternoon spent shopping can solve the quest for longer hair after all. ■