

IN THE THICK OF IT

Francesca White on the sociological, psychological and philosophical implications of thick hair – and the treatments that will help you get it

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here is nothing better than a thick ponytail, a fat plait or a sturdy bun: a proper, doughnut-like coil of plentiful, embarrassingly shiny hair. Because thick hair makes you instantly more attractive. (Can you think of a single hot person who has thin hair?) It's regal (every Disney princess, whether she lives underwater, in an icy castle or has been asleep for 1,000 years, has hair that never looks thin, flat or a bit

meh). It also makes it very tricky to determine your age. See someone with thick hair from behind and you'll have no clue how old they are. Thick hair doesn't give the game away, see? Thick hair is cleverer than that.

With thick hair, you can feel like a goddess or a princess. But you can also feel womanly and fruitful, because human beings associate an abundance of hair with fertility. (Actually, hair doesn't grow faster at times of peak fertility, though the approximately one million follicles on your scalp do hang on to hair for longer while oestrogen is flooding your system.) There's a reason why Botticelli and Rubens gave their women heavy golden curls as well as big, wobbly bottoms – and it wasn't just to cover their bits. It was because we collectively decided that masses and masses of free-flowing hair is attractive a long time ago. The same is still true today: 74 per cent of men say that they are drawn to a woman because of her hair – in fact, research shows that it is the first thing that men notice about us. (Yes! Even before our tits.)

Whether you feel it inside or not, thick hair can make you appear confident. 'Socially, we admire a thick head of hair because it implies strength,' says psychotherapist Lucy Beresford – and there is no one who understands this more than the Queen. If the Queen has thin hair, you simply can't tell. Those sensibly hot-rolled curls are a symbol of her absolute control; they are her helmet when

she goes into battle. With thick-looking hair, Elizabeth II is sturdier than HMS *Belfast* in gale-force winds.

Thick hair can also command joy. Friends, lovers and children will want to stroke your hair, to gather it up in fistfuls. Twisting hair and coiling it around our fingers satisfies our primitive grooming instinct; it has the same therapeutic benefits as petting a dog. But strokeability isn't just down to quantity; it is also down to shaft thickness (stop laughing). The line pedantically trotted out by every poor, fine-haired soul is that they have 'thin hair, but lots of it', which is a clever thing for a stylist to tell them, as it glosses over the truth of the matter – it is hard to make thin hair look abundant. According to Steve Shiel, scientific director of L'Oréal UK and Ireland, 'The diameter of hair varies significantly between thick and thin hair types. Typically, "thin" hair will be in the 40-to-60-micron margin [a micron is a thousandth of a millimetre] – so it's pretty fine. Medium hair falls at around 60 to 80 microns, while thick hair reaches up to 120 microns and beyond.' Imagine! A single thick hair can be over three times thicker than a fine hair. No wonder it takes so bloody long to dry.

Of course, thick hair can be a tad unmanageable at times – but that is pretty much the only downside. Thick hair looks better beneath a hat, when it's pinned up and when it's let down again. When it's dishevelled, it looks nonchalant and sort of 'off-duty Euro royal'; when it's wet, it goes all sexy and sea-salty, instead of sticking to your head and making you look like an otter. When it's blowdried, it holds its shape, its swing – and when it's brushed out afterwards, it still looks like it's stepped straight out of a salon. Thick hair doesn't have off-days. Thick hair does not go into meltdown when you forget to wash it. Thick hair does not quiver in a halo of terrified static when you come at it with a bristle brush. It is unshakeable and consistent. So, yes, it is hard to come up with a single bad thing about thick hair. Which is why it's so bloody annoying to have thin hair. There are, though, some things you can do.

You can fake it with a good cut, a clever colourist and the right products. 'It's impossible to make hair physically thicker,' says Pol Garcia, artistic style director at Gilly Green, 'but you can give hair the illusion of being thicker by means of a good support structure – like you would with a house.' Garcia describes his technique for giving fine hair the ▷



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< illusion of fullness as 'internal layering'. He splits the hair into three sections: the bottom and the middle of the head, which he snips into at an angle with his scissors; and the top, which he leaves more or less alone – in the sense that that section simply falls over the lower 'support' sections, giving it awesome body and movement.

Colour may also help you in your quest to achieve thicker-looking hair. But what you must NOT do, says Josh Wood (and when it comes to colour, Josh is always right), is colour hair in a single blanket shade: 'It makes things look very monotone. Adding light and dark, however, gives the hair depth. For example, slightly sunkissed ends that are lighter than the body of the hair result in a denser, more substantial-looking root.' But what happens when, thanks to that delightful process known as ageing, hair starts to turn grey? 'A lot of women feel that they're going thinner when this happens,' says Wood, 'and that's because, with no melanin, the hair becomes more transparent. But adding pigment back into the hair means that it appears thicker. Though it's better not to go too dark – you don't want a contrast between the hair and the scalp.'

If you can deal with the upkeep (frequent brushing, monthly appointments to make sure things are still thriving), then extensions will make your hair thicker than any cut or colour ever could. The upside? A head of hair that is genuinely and noticeably more plentiful than what your mother gave you. The downside? 'They're addictive. There's nothing quite like the feeling of having hair three times as thick as your own,' says Wood. The American brand Hair Lingerie is so called because its extensions are virtually undetectable, and Marie or Lorraine at Show Dry on Westbourne Grove will colour-match, blend together, chop into and style them in such a way that you'll swear blind this fabulous new hair is your own. And because the strips are so delicate, it's preferable that you have fine hair to begin with – they add bulk while still blending seamlessly. No one will be any the wiser as your hair rustles, like a very attractive tree, with these wondrously soft 'leaves' – but they WILL tell you how good your blowdry looks. Every day.

Hersheisons has also come up with some very clever Hair Fillers, £250, which are basically hair extensions for beginners: the difference being that they are only applied at the front, to give the hairline some

oomph (it's the first bit to go thin). Otherwise, their clip-in hairpieces (from £19 for a jazzy pink or lilac Instant Highlight, to £146 for a set of 10 mermaid strips) are so easy to use that the cat could wear them. And then – magic! – they pop out again at the end of the night.

The right products can also make fine hair feel more substantial – but go easy. Heavy mousses, sprays, styling mists and creams can send hair into a swift downward spiral; thin hair is generally anxious in the presence of too much product, becoming flatter and sulkier as the day (or night) wears on. Instead, try a sulphate-free shampoo (sulphates make fine hair feel heavy), a gravity-defyingly light serum to stop hair from flying away or a talc-free dry shampoo to give a nice lifting effect at the roots (Show Dry's, £30, is made with tapioca powder, which leaves hair feeling silkier than a mink's pelt). If that sounds like too much hard work, try throwing your head upside down, tucking hair into a little chignon before you go to bed, and then dropping it down the next day. 'It gives a lovely feeling of thickness and volume,' says hairstylist Wendy Iles.

If hair is neither thin nor forlorn but literally disappearing – falling out in clumps and swirling down the drain when you wash it – then none of these things will really help. But a trichologist will – like Ricardo Vila Nova at Urban Retreat, who uses light therapy to wake up dormant hair follicles (from £200), or a cosmetic doctor like Maurice Dray, on Albert Place, who injects growth factors (taken from a blood sample) into the scalp, which sounds eye-watering (it is) but really helps to encourage new hairs. A course of eight sessions within a two-month period is recommended, and it is said not only to stimulate blood supply and bring nutrients to the area, but also to balance the hormones around the hair follicle; excess dihydrotestosterone (DHT), a derivative of testosterone, causes follicles to shrink and eventually stop producing hair. The result? Hair stops falling out after two sessions and begins growing again two months after you've finished the course. (Mesohair, from £200).

The one thing thick hair isn't is cheap. A friend whose thick curtain of hair I had always admired had an extra £50 whacked on her bill for having too MUCH of the stuff to highlight. 'It's like going to a spa for a scrub and being charged more because you're fat,' she complained. I'm not sympathetic. □

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PLUMP IT UP



KLORANE
Shampoo with Flax Fibre, £8

A silicone-free shampoo that won't weigh hair down.



ILES
Formula Haute Performance Finishing Serum, £38, at Urban Retreat

Its sulphate-free formula leaves things feeling lightweight.



SWELL
Step 3 Ultimate Volume Root Complex, £32

This one increases hair growth by 93 per cent. Apparently.



BUMBLE AND BUMBLE
Surf Foam Spray Blow Dry, £20

The gritty texture gives good grip to flat hair.



KÉRASTASE
Résistance Spray Volumifique, £21

Expands the hair shaft, leaving things wonderfully airy and full of life.



KEVIN MURPHY
Puff the Magic Powder, £19

Pop onto roots for instant volume.



PHILIP KINGSLEY
Prep Plumping Cream, £18.50

A thickening cream that fattens up the finest hair.