

FREE GUIDE · FOR WOMEN 35+

The Hair *Food List*

What your follicles actually run on, with real amounts, smart pairings & the "too much" list.

EVIDENCE FILE

Inside: protein per meal · the iron + vitamin C pairing · zinc, selenium, vitamin D & biotin in real food · the egg file · a week of hair-plate recipes with full nutrition · when more backfires

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Your hair is fed from the inside.

Sprays, masks and egg water sit on the outside. Your follicles get their supplies from your bloodstream, which means your plate matters more than your spray bottle.

Growing hair is busy work. Each strand is mostly **keratin**, a protein, and the follicle needs a steady supply of protein, iron, zinc and vitamins to keep building it. When your body is running short, hair is often one of the first places it shows.

This list won't diagnose you, and food can't fix every kind of hair loss. Hormones, genetics, thyroid issues and medications all play a part. But food is the one lever you control three times a day, and most of us are missing at least one piece.

YOU'LL LEARN

- How much **protein** you need, and what that looks like on a plate
- The **iron + vitamin C** pairing, and what blocks it
- Where to get **zinc, selenium, vitamin D and biotin** from food
- The truth about **eggs** (and egg water)
- Which nutrients **backfire** when you overdo them

HOW TO USE IT

1. Read it once. About 10 minutes.
2. Check your protein at each meal tomorrow (File 01).
3. Add one iron + C pairing a day (File 02).
4. Cook one recipe from File 05 this week. The grocery list is at the end of it.
5. Read File 06 before buying any supplement.

An honest note. This guide is for education only. It is not medical advice. Amounts are typical values from the NIH Office of Dietary Supplements and USDA FoodData Central, and they vary by brand and portion. If you're pregnant, managing a health condition or taking medication, check with your clinician before changing your diet or adding supplements.

Protein at every meal

Hair is built from keratin, a protein. If your breakfast is coffee and a granola bar, your follicles are working with scraps.

46 g

a day is the official minimum (RDA) for most adult women. It works out to about **0.36 g per pound** of body weight, so a 150-lb woman needs at least 54 g. That's the floor, not a target.

Simple rule: get a **palm-sized protein** at every meal instead of saving it all for dinner. Spreading it out is easier than one huge serving.

Eating a lot less lately? Fast weight loss, including on GLP-1 medications, is a classic shedding trigger. Ask your prescriber about a daily protein target.

Food (typical portion)	Protein, about
Chicken breast, 3 oz cooked	26 g
Salmon, 3 oz cooked	22 g
Tuna, canned, 3 oz	20 g
Greek yogurt, plain, 6 oz	17 g
Cottage cheese, ½ cup	12 g
Lentils, ½ cup cooked	9 g
Edamame, ½ cup shelled	9 g
Pumpkin seeds, 1 oz	8 g
Egg, 1 large	6 g
Black beans, ½ cup cooked	7 g

Protein RDA: National Academies Dietary Reference Intakes. Food values: USDA FoodData Central (rounded).

The iron + vitamin C pairing

Iron is the nutrient most often discussed for women who shed. The plant kind absorbs poorly on its own, but vitamin C in the same meal helps it get absorbed.

WOMEN 19–50

18 mg

iron a day (periods use it up)

WOMEN 51+

8 mg

iron a day after menopause

TWO KINDS

Heme (meat, fish) absorbs best. **Non-heme** (beans, greens, fortified cereal) needs a vitamin C partner.

Iron foods	Iron, about
Fortified cereal, 1 serving	up to 18 mg
Oysters, 3 oz cooked	8 mg
White beans, 1 cup	8 mg
Lentils, ½ cup	3 mg
Spinach, ½ cup cooked	3 mg
Firm tofu, ½ cup	3 mg
Beef, 3 oz	2 mg

Vitamin C partners	Vit. C, about
Red bell pepper, ½ cup raw	95 mg
Orange, 1 medium	70 mg
Kiwi, 1 medium	64 mg
Broccoli, ½ cup cooked	51 mg
Strawberries, ½ cup	49 mg
Women need about 75 mg of vitamin C a day.	

Watch the blockers. Tea and coffee (polyphenols) and calcium can reduce iron absorption from the same meal. Have your coffee between meals, not with your iron-rich lunch.

Don't self-dose iron pills. Too much iron is harmful. Ask your doctor for a **ferritin** test (iron stores) first. Comment **SHED** for my free Shed Files guide, which includes the appointment script.

NIH Office of Dietary Supplements: Iron and Vitamin C fact sheets.

The small but mighty four

You need these in tiny amounts. Low levels have been linked to hair problems, and food covers most women just fine.

ZINC · 8 MG/DAY

Oysters (3 oz) about **32 mg** · beef (3 oz) about 3.8 mg · pumpkin seeds (1 oz) about 2.2 mg · cashews (1 oz) about 1.6 mg · chickpeas (½ cup) about 1.3 mg

Upper limit 40 mg a day. Too much zinc can cause a copper deficiency.

SELENIUM · 55 MCG/DAY

Tuna (3 oz) about 92 mcg · sardines (3 oz) about 45 mcg · eggs, chicken, whole grains

Brazil nuts: one ounce (6–8 nuts) has about **544 mcg**, well over the 400 mcg upper limit. Too much selenium is linked to hair loss and brittle nails. One or two nuts is plenty.

VITAMIN D · 600 IU/DAY

Sockeye salmon (3 oz) about **570 IU** · fortified milk (1 cup) about 120 IU · egg yolk about 44 IU
800 IU from age 71. Hard to get from food alone, so it's worth asking about a vitamin D level at your next blood test.

BIOTIN · 30 MCG/DAY

Egg about **10 mcg** · salmon (3 oz) about 5 mcg · sunflower seeds (¼ cup) about 2.6 mcg · sweet potato (½ cup) about 2.4 mcg · almonds (¼ cup) about 1.5 mcg

Real deficiency is rare. Many hair supplements contain hundreds of times the daily amount (see File 06).

The easy win: a handful of pumpkin seeds on your yogurt or salad covers protein and zinc at once. Salmon twice a week covers protein, vitamin D and biotin.

NIH Office of Dietary Supplements: Zinc, Selenium, Vitamin D and Biotin fact sheets. Almohanna HM et al., Dermatol Ther 2019.

The egg file

Egg water went viral as a spray for your roots. I couldn't find a single study showing it reduces shedding. The egg itself, eaten, is a different story.

6 g

protein in one large egg

10 mcg

biotin in one cooked egg, a third of your day, mostly in the yolk

44 IU

vitamin D in the yolk

The part nobody tells you: raw whites

Raw egg whites contain **avidin**, a protein that grabs biotin and stops your body from absorbing it. Cooking breaks avidin down, but it takes real cooking. In one lab study, whites that were boiled for only 2 minutes still had about 40% of their avidin activity. A fully set, hard-cooked egg doesn't have that problem.

- ☐ Eat the **whole** egg. The yolk carries most of the biotin and the vitamin D.
- ☐ Cook it through: hard-boiled, scrambled firm, or baked.
- ☐ Skip raw eggs in smoothies.
- ☐ Pair it: eggs + spinach + a side of strawberries = protein, iron and vitamin C on one plate.

My routine: two cooked eggs at breakfast, most days. It's an easy 12 grams of protein before 9 a.m.

NIH ODS Biotin fact sheet · USDA FoodData Central · Durance TD, J Food Sci 1991 (avidin heat inactivation).

A week of hair plates

Eight mini recipes plus snacks. Each one covers protein + iron + vitamin C on a single plate. Mix and match them across your week.

Daily targets, women: protein about 0.36 g per lb · iron 18 mg (8 mg at 51+) · vitamin C 75 mg · zinc 8 mg · selenium 55 mcg · vitamin D 600 IU · biotin 30 mcg

BREAKFAST

Serves 1 · 10 min

Spinach egg scramble

Protein, biotin, iron + C

- **2** large eggs, whisked with a pinch of salt
- **2 cups** baby spinach
- **1 tsp** butter or olive oil
- **1 slice** whole-wheat toast
- **½ cup** sliced strawberries on the side
- **To taste** black pepper, ¼ tsp garlic powder, chili flakes (optional)

Melt the butter in a nonstick pan over medium heat. Wilt the spinach with the garlic powder (1 min). Pour in the eggs and stir slowly until fully set, with no runny whites. Pepper on top, toast and berries on the side.

300
calories

19 g
protein

23 g
carbs

15 g
fat

5 g
fiber

4.5 mg
iron

66 mg
vit C

2.3 mg
zinc

40 mcg
selenium

90 IU
vit D

20.5 mcg
biotin

BREAKFAST

Serves 1 · 5 min

Toasted pumpkin seed yogurt bowl

Protein, zinc, vitamin C

- **6 oz** plain 2% Greek yogurt
- **1 oz** (3 tbsp) pumpkin seeds
- **1 kiwi**, peeled and sliced
- **1 tsp** honey
- **To taste** ¼ tsp cinnamon, a drop of vanilla, pinch of flaky salt

Toast the pumpkin seeds in a dry pan for 2 min with the flaky salt, until they start to pop. Stir the cinnamon and vanilla into the yogurt, then top with kiwi, warm seeds and a drizzle of honey.

350
calories

26 g
protein

27 g
carbs

18 g
fat

4 g
fiber

2.6 mg
iron

64 mg
vit C

3.2 mg
zinc

19 mcg
selenium

0 IU
vit D

0.2 mcg
biotin

BREAKFAST

Serves 1 · 3 min

Cereal, done right

Iron + C, vitamin D, protein

- **1 cup** iron-fortified cereal (look for 45%+ DV iron on the label)
- **1 cup** 2% milk (or fortified soy milk)
- **1** orange, in wedges
- **1** hard-boiled egg (make a batch on Sunday)
- **To taste** salt and pepper or everything-bagel seasoning on the egg

Pour the cereal and milk, eat the orange with it (the vitamin C helps the cereal's iron absorb), and season the egg. Save the coffee or tea for 1 hour later.

355
calories

19 g
protein

48 g
carbs

12 g
fat

6 g
fiber

9.2 mg
iron

70 mg
vit C

5.7 mg
zinc

26 mcg
selenium

160 IU
vit D

10.3 mcg
biotin

LUNCH

Serves 1 · 10 min

Lemony lentil bowl

Protein, iron + C, fiber

- **1 cup** cooked lentils (or rinsed canned)
- **½ cup** chopped raw red bell pepper
- **½ cup** chopped cucumber
- **1 cup** baby spinach
- **1 oz** crumbled feta
- **1 tbsp** olive oil
- **1 tbsp** lemon juice
- **½** small garlic clove, grated
- **To taste** ½ tsp dried oregano, salt, black pepper

Whisk the oil, lemon, garlic, oregano, salt and pepper in the bottom of a bowl. Add the lentils, pepper, cucumber and spinach, then toss. Top with feta.

470
calories

24 g
protein

50 g
carbs

21 g
fat

18 g
fiber

8.0 mg
iron

115 mg
vit C

3.8 mg
zinc

10 mcg
selenium

0 IU
vit D

0.2 mcg
biotin

LUNCH

Serves 1 · 10 min

Tuna & white bean salad

Protein, selenium, iron + C

- **1 can** (5 oz) light tuna in water, drained
- **½ cup** canned white beans, rinsed
- **½ cup** chopped raw red bell pepper
- **2 tbsp** finely diced red onion
- **2 tbsp** chopped parsley
- **2 cups** baby spinach, to serve
- **1 tbsp** olive oil
- **½ lemon**, juiced (about 1½ tbsp)
- **1 tsp** Dijon mustard
- **To taste** salt, black pepper, pinch of chili flakes

Whisk the oil, lemon, Dijon, salt, pepper and chili flakes. Fold in the tuna, beans, pepper, onion and parsley. Pile it over the spinach. It keeps 2 days in the fridge.

460 calories	41 g protein	39 g carbs	16 g fat	10 g fiber
8.1 mg iron	134 mg vit C	3.1 mg zinc	93 mcg selenium	50 IU vit D
				1.3 mcg biotin

DINNER

Serves 1 · 30 min

Garlic-paprika salmon sheet pan

Protein, vitamin D, biotin, C

- **4 oz** raw salmon fillet, sockeye if you can (about 3 oz cooked)
- **1 medium** sweet potato (about 5 oz), cubed
- **1 cup** broccoli florets
- **1 tbsp** olive oil, split three ways
- **½ tsp** smoked paprika + **½ tsp** garlic powder
- **To taste** salt, black pepper, a lemon wedge to finish

Heat the oven to 425°F. Toss the sweet potato with 1 tsp oil and salt, then roast 15 min. Add the broccoli (1 tsp oil, salt) and the salmon rubbed with the last 1 tsp oil, paprika, garlic powder, salt and pepper. Roast 12–15 min more, until the salmon flakes (145°F). Squeeze the lemon over everything.

410 calories	28 g protein	35 g carbs	19 g fat	9 g fiber
2.2 mg iron	126 mg vit C	1.4 mg zinc	33 mcg selenium	570 IU vit D
				8.2 mcg biotin

DINNER

Serves 1 · 20 min

Ginger-garlic beef stir-fry

Heme iron, zinc, vitamin C

- **4 oz** raw sirloin or flank steak, thin strips (about 3 oz cooked)
- **1 cup** broccoli florets
- **½ cup** sliced red bell pepper
- **¾ cup** cooked brown rice
- **2 tsp** avocado or olive oil, for the pan
- **Sauce** 1 tbsp low-sodium soy sauce, 1 tsp honey, 1 tsp grated ginger, 1 garlic clove (minced), squeeze of lime
- **1 tsp** toasted sesame oil + 1 tsp sesame seeds to finish
- **To taste** pinch of red pepper flakes, sliced green onion

Stir the sauce together. Sear the beef in 1 tsp hot oil for 2 min, then take it out. Add the last 1 tsp oil, broccoli and pepper, plus 2 tbsp water, and cook 3–4 min. Return the beef, pour in the sauce and toss 1 min. Finish with sesame oil, seeds and flakes, and serve over rice.

595 calories	36 g protein	63 g carbs	22 g fat	10 g fiber
4.7 mg iron	182 mg vit C	6.2 mg zinc	41 mcg selenium	0 IU vit D
				0.8 mcg biotin

DINNER

Serves 1 · 20 min

Smoky crumbled tofu tacos

Protein, iron + C, fiber

- **7 oz** firm tofu (½ block), patted dry and crumbled
- **½ cup** canned black beans, rinsed
- **3 small** (6") corn tortillas, warmed
- **2 tsp** avocado or olive oil
- **Spices** 1 tsp chili powder, ½ tsp cumin, ½ tsp garlic powder, ½ tsp smoked paprika, salt
- **1 cup** shredded red cabbage + juice of ½ lime + pinch of salt (slaw)
- **¼ cup** salsa, plus cilantro and extra lime

Brown the tofu in the oil over medium-high, 6–8 min, until golden. Add the spices and beans with a splash of water and cook 2 min. Toss the cabbage with the lime and salt. Fill the tortillas, top with slaw, salsa and cilantro.

585 calories	34 g protein	68 g carbs	22 g fat	17 g fiber
8.3 mg iron	48 mg vit C	3.8 mg zinc	25 mcg selenium	0 IU vit D
				n/a* biotin

Snacks @ your grocery list

SNACK

Berry cottage cheese

- ½ cup 2% cottage cheese
- ½ cup sliced strawberries
- **To taste** pinch of cinnamon

120 calories	12 g protein	11 g carbs	3 g fat	2 g fiber
0.5 mg iron	49 mg vit C	0.7 mg zinc	10 mcg selenium	0 IU vit D
				n/a* biotin

SNACK

Chili-lime edamame

- 1 cup edamame in pods (½ cup shelled), steamed
- **To taste** squeeze of lime, flaky salt, chili flakes

95 calories	9 g protein	8 g carbs	4 g fat	4 g fiber
1.8 mg iron	7 mg vit C	1.0 mg zinc	1 mcg selenium	0 IU vit D
				n/a* biotin

SNACK

Nut handful

- 1 oz almonds (about 23)
- 1 Brazil nut. Just one, not the bag.

195 calories	7 g protein	7 g carbs	18 g fat	4 g fiber
1.1 mg iron	0 mg vit C	1.1 mg zinc	81 mcg selenium	0 IU vit D
				1.2 mcg biotin

Grocery list (makes every recipe once)

Protein & dairy

1 dozen eggs · 6 oz plain 2% Greek yogurt · small tub 2% cottage cheese · 2% milk · 1 oz feta · 4 oz salmon (frozen is fine) · 4 oz sirloin or flank · 1 can light tuna · 14 oz firm tofu · 1 bag frozen edamame

Produce

5 oz baby spinach · 2 red bell peppers · 1 head broccoli · 1 lb strawberries · 1 kiwi · 1 orange · 1 lemon · 2 limes · 1 sweet potato · 1 cucumber · ¼ red cabbage · 1 red onion · parsley · cilantro · fresh ginger · garlic · green onion

Pantry

Iron-fortified cereal · whole-wheat bread · brown rice · corn tortillas · lentils · canned white & black beans · salsa · pumpkin seeds · almonds · Brazil nuts · sesame seeds · honey · Dijon · low-sodium soy sauce

Oils & spices: olive oil · avocado oil · toasted sesame oil · butter · smoked paprika · garlic powder · chili powder · cumin · dried oregano · cinnamon · red pepper flakes · flaky salt · black pepper · everything-bagel seasoning (optional)

Give it time. Hair grows about half an inch a month, so any change from eating better shows up over months, not days. Judge it with photos at 3 months, not the mirror tomorrow.

How the numbers were worked out: each ingredient's values from USDA FoodData Central (rounded), with vitamin D and biotin from NIH ODS fact sheets, added up per recipe. Vitamin D for salmon uses sockeye; farmed salmon varies. Biotin is counted only for foods with an NIH value, so real totals may be a little higher. *n/a = no NIH biotin value for these foods, not zero. Brands and portions vary, so treat every number as "about".

When more backfires

If you're low in something, fixing it can matter. If you're not low, more isn't better, and a few nutrients can actually make shedding worse.

Nutrient	Upper limit (adults)	Why it matters
Vitamin A (preformed)	3,000 mcg RAE a day	Too much is linked to hair loss. It hides in multivitamins, "hair, skin & nails" gummies and cod liver oil.
Selenium	400 mcg a day	Too much is linked to hair loss and brittle nails. Watch Brazil nuts plus supplements.
Zinc	40 mg a day	Long-term excess can cause a copper deficiency.
Iron	45 mg a day	Only supplement if a blood test shows you need it.
Biotin	No official limit	High doses can make lab tests wrong, including thyroid and heart (troponin) tests. The FDA has issued a warning.

The 2-minute stack check

- 1 Line up everything you take: multivitamin, hair vitamin, gummies, powders.
- 2 Add up vitamin A, selenium, zinc and iron across **all** of them.
- 3 Compare the totals to the upper limits above. Remember that food adds to them too.
- 4 Taking biotin? Tell your doctor and the lab before any blood work.

Food is one clue, not a diagnosis. Sudden patches, a scalp that itches or burns, heavy shedding for more than 6 months, or a widening part all deserve a doctor visit. Comment **SHED** for my free Shed Files guide, which has the appointment script and the labs to ask about.

NIH ODS fact sheets (Vitamin A, Selenium, Zinc, Iron, Biotin) · U.S. FDA biotin safety communication · Almohanna HM et al., Dermatol Ther 2019.

Sources & disclaimer

- NIH Office of Dietary Supplements. Fact sheets for health professionals: Biotin, Iron, Vitamin C, Zinc, Selenium, Vitamin D, Vitamin A. ods.od.nih.gov
- U.S. Department of Agriculture. FoodData Central. fdc.nal.usda.gov
- National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. Dietary Reference Intakes for Energy, Carbohydrate, Fiber, Fat, Fatty Acids, Cholesterol, Protein, and Amino Acids.
- Almohanna HM, Ahmed AA, Tsatalis JP, Tosti A. The Role of Vitamins and Minerals in Hair Loss: A Review. *Dermatol Ther (Heidelb)*. 2019;9(1):51–70.
- Durance TD. Residual avidin activity in cooked egg white assayed with improved sensitivity. *J Food Sci*. 1991;56(3):707–709.
- U.S. Food & Drug Administration. Safety communication: biotin may interfere with lab tests. [fda.gov](https://www.fda.gov)
- American Academy of Dermatology. Healthy hair tips. [aad.org](https://www.aad.org)

Disclaimer. This guide is general education. It does not diagnose, treat or replace care from a qualified professional. Nutrient amounts are typical values and vary by brand, portion and preparation. If you're pregnant, breastfeeding, managing a health condition or taking medication, talk with your clinician before changing your diet or starting any supplement. Some links shared by this account are affiliate links, and I may earn a commission at no extra cost to you.

Case not closed. Case organized.

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