

Into Thin Hair

Going bald isn't every man's nightmare. Just yours. Read this and your next haircut will make you feel a whole lot better

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WHY DO WE SAY "LOSING hair" and not "gaining head"? Probably for the same reason we say "losing virginity" and not "finding sex." When it comes to these two sticky topics, looks and performance, men can be so inherently pessimistic.

But if you—yeah, you, the guy with the failing follicles—want to continue to project the same confidence and virility you did when you had a full head of hair (and steam), you need to accept that you haven't changed. Only your looks have. And our looks are supposed to evolve.

To that end, think of your head as a country, with you as president. Your thinning hair is a hot-button political topic. You, as president, can either tell the truth—while putting a positive spin on it, of course—or get caught in a visual web of lies. Positive spin, in this case, is a damn fine haircut. With the right style, you can look smarter and more powerful, even presidential—whether your problem is a receding hairline, a bald spot, or a full-blown "horseshoe." We can't make you president, of course, but we have spoken with a man who can make you look like one: Jeff Sacino, head hairstylist for NBC's *The West Wing*. Take his advice, then smile for the camera.

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PICK THE RIGHT SCISSOR HANDS.

Barber or stylist? It's like choosing between Best Buy and Bang & Olufsen. No wrong answer; just different levels of right. Bottom line: "Find the person that does the best scissor work for you," says Sacino.

The barber: Barbershops are assembly lines for haircuts, says Sacino. The less hair you have, the more logical this choice, especially if you just want it simple and short (or if the thought of going to a hair salon makes your testosterone boil). But if you're not sure what you want—or if you want something specific—a barber's likely to disappoint.

The stylist: "Stylists will always choose a hairstyle that fits your face," says Sacino. "They'll take the time to justify the cut and tell you why it'll work for you." Why? They're trained to, and you're paying them a lot more than you would a barber. (Ah, if only balding men could pay by the strand.)

RECAST YOUR HAIRLINE FRACTURES.

Men usually try to combat a receding hairline in one of two ways, says Sacino. They grow their hair a little longer and slick it back, or they try to structure their 'do to look like it used to. Both are mistakes. Instead, strive for volume. "If you want that 'important' aura, with your hair thick in front and strong throughout, use a light gel in your hair and blow it dry while fluffing with a round brush," Sacino says. Your haircutter can teach you how.

If blow-drying goes against everything you stand for, "cutting your hair shorter and leaving it more natural can be best," says

WHENEVER POSSIBLE, FEED YOUR HAIR STEAK. CLAY COCKERELL, M.D., A CLINICAL associate professor of dermatology at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center, recommends products that are high in protein (amino acids), fat (palmitic acid, a lipid), and vitamins, which coat the hair and keep it healthy. Stay away from shampoos that contain sodium laureth (or lauryl) sulfate; both are harsh cleansers. "The most important thing is to avoid excessive damage to the hair," he says. Our hair-healthy favorites:

▷ Nioxin produces a whole line of natural products specifically designed for men with thinning hair. The potions promote a healthy scalp, which in turn helps keep the hair as thick as possible. Try **Nioxin Bliss**, a leave-in conditioner that also provides UV protection. \$8 at nioxin.com

▷ **Redken Extreme's Anti-Snap** is a leave-in treatment that fortifies thin or damaged hair and helps prevent breakage, a big concern for men with dwindling hair, says Men's Health fashion director Brian Boyé. \$14 at redken.com

▷ **Min Wash (shampoo) and Rinse (conditioner)** are safe for guys who color, but they also contain saw palmetto, *Ginkgo biloba*, and panthenol, which improve volume. \$14 each. (866) 227-2566

▷ **Bumble & Bumble's Gloss** gives hair luster while its **Groom Cream** adds texture with lots of vitamins A, D, and E, says West Wing hairstylist Jeff Sacino. Groom Cream, \$20; Gloss, \$13. (800) 728-6253

▷ For styling that keeps hair controlled and soft, Sacino recommends **Kiehl's Crème with Silk Groom**, which contains both palmitic and amino acids, plus vitamins A and E. \$17 for 4 ounces at kiehls.com



Head and shoulders above the rest.

grow your hair long, it separates," creating a valley that goes all the way down to the shiny scalp. Keeping the hair shorter—but not too short—gives it a feathering effect, in which one group of hairs covers the next. "The men with power on our show have short, very clean-looking hair. We're talking about the president's staff. Their hair is power."

Also, when your hair gets this thin, avoid styling gels. "They're the worst because they grab too much hair and show more baldness.

beard with stiff lines does not look good. Use thinning shears to tailor it so there are no hard lines, so it looks natural."

Guys who do it right: Sean Connery in any role without a rug

BANISH THE BALD MAN'S BAD BOOB JOB.

That would be the comb-over. If you're left with a horseshoe—little or no hair on top and a lot on the sides—keep it as neat and natural as possible. To be taken seriously, show your extra skin and tailor what hair you have left. With a shorter cut, you take attention away from the hair and put it where it belongs, on your face. "Ed Harris can play any role because it's about his face," Sacino says. "When you see him, you never think about his head. It's about his dialogue, his eyes."

Guys who do it right: Harris, Patrick Stewart, James Gandolfini

SPIT-SHINE YOUR CHROME.

Lots of balding badasses—from Willis to Michael Chiklis to Samuel L. Jackson—have shaved their heads clean to great effect. But the question for us not-so-badasses is, Can we carry the role? "A shaved head is a tough look," says Sacino. "Vin Diesel shaves to look stronger and have a more dominant presence onscreen. Frankly, I don't think the average guy who wears a suit to work should do it." But you'll never know until you try. Buzz your hair to stubble, then shave with cream and a razor, as you would your face. Don't like it? Don't worry—it'll grow back.

Well, whatever's left will, anyway. **MH**

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Sacino. He points to the cooler style of *Wing's* Bradley Whitford. "His character is not going to look in the mirror and blow-dry his hair. So we keep his hair looking as if he got out of the shower and let it dry on its own." The more conditioned you keep it, the shinier it looks and the more natural it stays. Leave-in conditioners (see "Hair Today, Here to Stay," above right) keep your hair fluffy and textured, which makes you look as if you have more of it.

Guys who do it right: Nicolas Cage, Matthew McConaughey, Bruce Willis in the *Die Hard* films

LENGTHEN YOUR HAIR BY CUTTING IT.

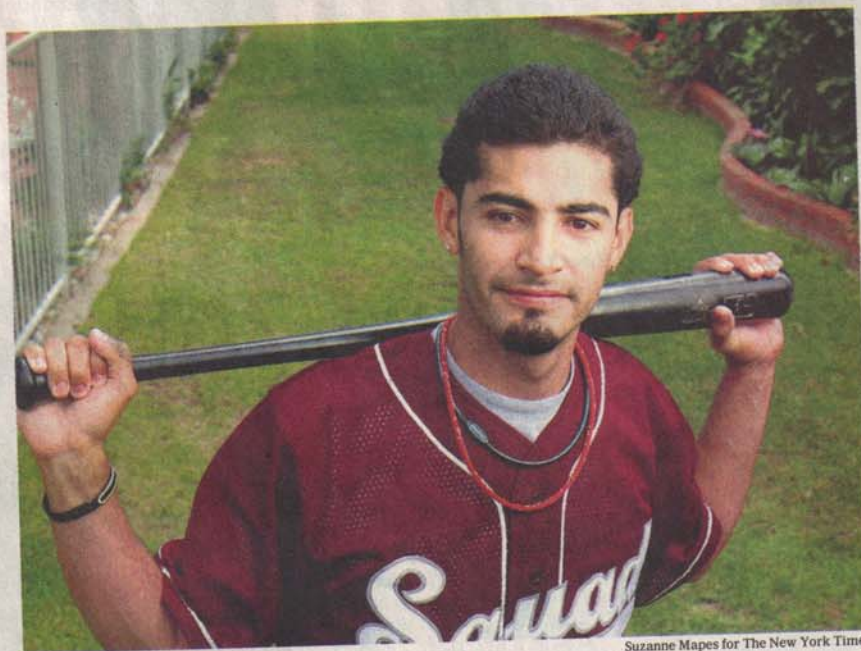
Men often believe that the longer their hair is, the more it covers up their bald spot. "That's absolutely not true," Sacino says. "When you

stay with creams and texturizing lotions and you'll get a much more natural look."

Guys who do it right: David Letterman, Gene Hackman, Anthony Hopkins

PUT ON A GOOD FACE. It's long-held dogma that facial hair can look good on a balding man. The key is not overdoing it—think Connery, not Kubrick. "You want to wear a beard that shows your face," says Sacino. "The less you cover a man's facial expressions, the better he looks." Unkempt facial hair is jarring, especially if the hair around your head is clean-cut. A mustache and goatee need to be trimmed to the same length and touched up every couple of days. If you go with a full beard, Sacino points to the way actor Richard Schiff is groomed for the show: "A structured

Performance-Enhancing Jewelry Knocking 'Em Out of the Park



Suzanne Mapes for The New York Times

MAGIC CIRCLE? Greg Benoit, an amateur baseball player, wears two Phiten necklaces.

By JON FINKEL

MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL players can't be wrong. Or at least that's what some of their fans think. All summer, an increasing number of professional ballplayers have been wearing necklaces and bracelets embedded with titanium for their supposed energy-boosting properties. Now their fans have begun to wear them, too.

Greg Benoit, 23, an amateur center fielder in Anaheim, Calif., learned about the necklaces, made by a Japanese company, when he saw his cousin Joaquin Benoit, a pitcher for the Texas Rangers, wearing one last year. "Then when I saw guys like Randy Johnson, Curt Schilling and a lot of the World Series Champion Boston Red Sox wearing it, I had to ask about it," said Mr. Benoit, who now owns two necklaces and two bracelets he bought at a Phiten store in Torrance, Calif. "The guys in the majors are the ones doing what we want to do. They're superstar pro athletes, and we want to be superstar athletes, so if they have it, we'll try it."

Phiten, the company that makes the necklaces and bracelets — nylon strands embedded with titanium — claims on its Web site that they produce an electrical charge that enhances the body's "energy management system, increasing the capacity of every cell."

The absence of any scientific evidence to bolster the company's claim seems not to have slowed sales. This month alone, Phiten says, it has sold 25,000 necklaces and bracelets, which retail for \$23 and \$15 respectively, in the United States. That is more than seven times the

3,500 sold nationwide in April.

But sports medicine experts doubt that the thousands of new customers are getting what they pay for.

"We have a long history in our society of looking for quick fixes," said Michael Voight, an exercise physiologist at the University of Southern California who also advises five of the university's sports teams. "Athletes are bombarded with images of these necklaces on TV and in print media, so they assume it works. That kind of exposure can have a very profound psychological effect and the resulting psychosomatic feelings cannot be underestimated."

Titanium products appeal not only to athletes like Greg Benoit but also to ordinary exercisers, who hope they will make everyday workouts easier. Some people think of them as a kind of alternative medicine that assuages their aches and makes them feel better.

Clayton Everline, 27, of Short Hills, N.J., has been wearing a titanium necklace since friends recommended it a few years ago. "Every time I wear the necklace or another Phiten accessory, I do perform better," said Mr. Everline, a third-year resident at St. Michael's Medical Center in Newark. "I surf and lift weights. I attribute my improvement in those activities to Phiten."

At first he wore the necklace only at the gym. But soon he stopped taking it off after workouts, and even took to wearing a Phiten T-shirt under his hospital scrubs and has observed an effect at work, too. "I feel an increased blood flow throughout the day," he said.

How are the products supposed to work?

According to Phiten, a water-soluble form of the element titanium is given an electrical charge. After pro-



Lars Klove for The New York Times

Skeptics say the bands are placebos, but wearers insist that they feel better.

cessing, the company says the special titanium can make the bioelectric currents in people flow more efficiently, increasing energy levels and stamina, said Joe Furuhashi, a Phiten spokesman.

Physicians do not buy the idea. Dr. David Baron, the chairman of family medicine at Santa Monica-UCLA Medical Center, said Phiten's claims are based on wrong assumptions about the electrical energy in living things. "The human body absolutely generates certain electrical fields," he said. But that does not mean that those fields can be influenced by charged titanium or even if they could, that it would have any effect on a person's energy level, he said.

Alice Ishikawa, 63, a hairstylist from Gardena, Calif., a few years ago started wrapping Phiten titanium athletic tape around her wrists, to alleviate symptoms of carpal tunnel syndrome. Later she bought a black and white necklace and started wearing it to the gym and found that it had many virtues.

"I work out five days a week," said Mrs. Ishikawa, who goes to a Curves gym. "I have felt a significant difference as I've worn the necklace — just an overall sense of wellness."

Earlier this month, to deal with her arthritis pain, Mrs. Ishikawa tripled up, donning two bracelets and a necklace. She said her symptoms have lessened.

Such testimonials do not amount to evidence that the jewelry has any physiological effects. "There is no real science behind this and many other gimmicks that surface from time to time," said Roland A. Carlstedt, a sports psychologist and the chairman of the American Board of Sport Psychology. "Lack of objective proof may be irrelevant to susceptible and superstitious athletes who are very prone to the placebo effect."

Other experts agree that the titanium jewelry may provide a placebo effect. Jeffrey Wildfogel, a professor of psychology at Stanford University, said that when athletes put their faith in the necklaces, it can affect their performance. "If you believe that you're going to do well in your head, your preparation will be done in a confident manner," Dr. Wildfogel said. "This will most likely improve performance and focus, regardless of if there are any real physical effects from the necklace."

Dr. Baron agreed. "Far be it for me to tell a patient of mine that they aren't experiencing some benefit or harm they claim to feel," he said. "I'm personally very careful with the placebo effect. The mind-body connection is real and powerful."

But Mr. Voight argued that there can be a downside to an athlete using a Phiten product as a confidence booster, even if it is safe. "What happens if the necklace is lost or can't be replaced in time for competition?" he said. "The crutch is gone, and often, so is the confidence. That's why I encourage my athletes to take in the positive effects of their own effort."