

Dandruff shampoos — Addiction? ^[1]

Dear Alice,

I have dandruff that responds well to over-the-counter shampoo. Ergo, I have been using the stuff almost exclusively for ten years. No brand in particular, sometimes zinc pyrithione (the blue stuff!), sometimes coal tar (the smelly brown stuff!). Anytime I switch to non-dandruff shampoo for like three to four days straight, I get my dandruff back. I worry that I might be addicted to dandruff shampoo. Should I worry?

Flakey in Virginia

Answer

Dear Flakey in Virginia,

Dandruff tends to be a chronic condition. This means that it isn't going to go away anytime soon. More importantly, for you, it means that dandruff requires constant and long-term management and control.

It sounds as though you may want to wean yourself off of these shampoos. Unfortunately, the dandruff will come back if not treated with tar, zinc pyrithione, or selenium. What's happening is not necessarily a physically addictive process (if it were addictive, it's more likely to be addictive psychologically); instead, the ingredients in these dandruff shampoos are doing their job—controlling dandruff.

It's certainly possible that some dandruff shampoos cost more than regular shampoos. If cost is an issue, perhaps you can buy a generic brand—as long as the active ingredients are the same, the generic shampoos should do the same trick. Or, you could try using the dandruff shampoo every other, or every third, day.

If you're still concerned, you could see a health care provider. S/he may be able to give you a stronger shampoo that you would only need to use once a week. However, this treatment is typically prescribed for cases that are resistant to the over-the-counter dandruff shampoos that you've been using with success.

It seems as though your shampoo is doing the trick by keeping your dandruff under control. As the saying goes — if it ain't broke, don't fix it.

Alice!

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