

Stress and the Skin Fact Sheet

Stress can be the cause of dermatologic conditions, such as acne, brittle nails or even hair loss

Stress and the Skin

- When a person becomes stressed, the level of the body's stress hormone (cortisol) rises
- The rise in cortisol causes an increase in oil production which can lead to oily skin, acne and other related skin problems
- Increased oil production tends to cause temporary stress-related acne in patients with skin not typically affected by acne
- Stress also can have a negative effect on the skin's ability to repair itself after injury

Stressed-Out Hair

- Stress may be the primary reason for unexplained hair loss
- Hair loss can occur up to three months after a stressful event
- After the initial hair loss, hair typically grows back in six to nine months
- Childbirth or surgery also can cause hair loss
 - The body takes a "time out" from growing hair to concentrate on recovery and healing
- Patients with hair loss should see a dermatologist for a proper evaluation to rule out other medical causes including:
 - Improper nutrition
 - Extreme weight loss

Effects of Stress on Nails

- Some stressed people bite their nails, pick at them or rub their fingers over the thumb nail
 - Patients who self-inflict skin, nail or hair problems often need psychological help to modify their behavior
- Stress, certain diseases and chemotherapy can cause white horizontal lines to appear across the nails
- Stress also can cause brittle, peeling nails

For more information about stress and the skin, visit the American Academy of Dermatology's Web site at www.aad.org.