

# What Is the Difference Between a DERMATOLOGIST and a TRICHOLOGIST?

KNOWING WHO DOES WHAT CAN SAVE YOU TIME, MONEY AND MAYBE YOUR HAIR

**W**orldwide, there are more than 30 million men and 20 million women who are affected with either a scalp disorder

or some form of alopecia, or hair loss. (This includes male pattern baldness, however, so it's not as horrifying as it sounds.) The discipline of trichology—the scientific study of alopecia and scalp disorders—has been developed to heal them. But even with more than 50 million people who should be concerned, very few people really know what trichology is.

As a doctor of trichology, I am often confused with a dermatologist. When I explain about trichology, many of my patients have asked me, "What is the difference?" Since so many consumers have only heard of dermatologists, it is time for me to share my knowledge and explain the differences between these two specialized fields.

The biggest single difference is that a trichologist specializes only in alopecia and scalp disorders. While dermatologists look at some alopecia and scalp disorders, their area of interest is the body's skin itself. A dermatologist has a medical doctor's degree and has gone on to study a specialty in dermatology. Trichology is a paramedical profession; a trichologist needn't be a doctor of medicine at all. A licensed cosmetologist or barber can become one after

completing a three-year study. (This is not me. I am a PhD who specializes in trichology.)

When working with your hair or scalp, both a dermatologist and a trichologist look for erythema (redness), inflammation and infection. It is important to evaluate these visible signs. Both look for scaly scalp disorders, which could include psoriasis and eczema of the scalp. Both look for alopecia and damaged hair follicles. If the hair follicles are damaged, the degree of damage will be assessed. Then both decide on the treatment recommendation, or where to send the client if another specialist is required. For instance, a thyroid condition can cause hair loss, so the specialists could refer the patient to an endocrinologist.

Even though, like a lot of medical specialists, dermatologists and trichologists share a certain amount of turf, only a few dermatologists have trichology credentials.

## The trichologist

A trichologist is trained to look for all the different forms of alopecia. (There are more than 75.) A tricholo-

gist is trained to produce a microscopic analysis of the hair bulb and hair shaft, evaluate damaged hair follicles and scalp health and confirm the severity of the damaged follicles and the alopecia. If the hair follicles are damaged and scar tissue is confirmed, the hair might not grow back.

The trichologist must also analyze hair shaft defects (there are 36 types), give nutritional counseling, and work jointly with other medical professionals to assist in a person's overall health.

Trichologists evaluate nutritional deficiencies and may suggest a mineral analysis, which determines whether the hair is getting enough minerals to grow properly. The answer is probably no, since approximately 98 percent of the people on our planet are nutritionally deficient. She also recommends and performs scalp treatments, which vary according to the evaluation. Often, a person experiences three or more disorders simultaneously.

In correctly addressing alopecia and scalp disorder maladies, both internal and external factors must be

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considered. It is important that we recognize that there are some scalp disorders and diseases that require prescription medications. And there are some conditions that require proper health nutrition, scalp and hair nourishment, and topical scalp treatment therapies.

Certain forms of alopecia are most economically treated by a trichologist. Two common and notable forms are "chemical"—due to over-processing the hair with chemicals from relaxers to hair coloring—and "ponytail." Ponytails and ponytail attachments can create excessive tension, which can quickly lead to hair loss. This is found most often in children, cheerleaders, dancers and adult women. Also, swelling in the hair strands, mild forms of inflammation, poor scalp circulation, hair regrowth, breakage and itchy, scaly, dry or oily scalps are usually considered to be my territory.

### The dermatologist


You need a dermatologist to treat scalp infections, because they usually require an oral antibiotic. A dermatologist will also treat follicular keloids, which are often found in African-American men. These are special scars that lead to an overgrowth of tissue. Other maladies covered by dermatologists include acne keloidalis (scalp acne), discoid lupus erythematosus, (a connective tissue disorder of the body that causes discoloration, inflammation and scar tissue on the scalp), neurodermatitis (an itching in one specific part of the scalp that is most common in adults over 40) and moderate to severe forms of inflammation.

A dermatologist, being a medical doctor, is authorized to write prescrip-

tions or to give steroid injections and scalp biopsies.

### Summary

Maintaining good health is holistic, and a lot of scalp disorder symptoms may begin in other places in the body, so there are maladies that require the expertise of other professionals. After a consultation, a dermatologist or a trichologist may refer a client to an internal medical doctor, dentist, endocrinologist, neurologist, nutritionist, optometrist, psychologist or even a psychiatrist.

A consumer requiring an evaluation for alopecia or scalp disorders could go to either a dermatologist or a trichologist. The American Academy of Dermatology recognizes the field of trichology, and currently has one board member who is a doctor of trichology. Therefore, a consumer visiting a trichologist should feel confident in the knowledge and care that they will receive. An advantage to visiting a certified trichologist is that it is generally less expensive when insurance coverage is not applicable. But in general, the different focus and training of trichologists and dermatologists allow them to work together to ensure that your hair and scalp are as healthy as possible. 

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### Five signs of a scalp crisis:

- Redness or inflammation on your scalp
- Burning or tingling sensations
- Pimples or scalp lesions
- Black dots on your scalp
- Short and long strands of hair in your comb or on the bathroom floor

### Foods recommended for a healthy scalp:

- Green vegetables
- Melons
- Soy foods
- Beans
- Organic meats