If you’re spending money on expensive hair products that don’t deliver their promise of shiny and silky strands, perhaps it’s your nutrition that’s the problem. Maybe you need to make over your diet to feed your hair from the inside out.

Foods such as lean proteins, whole grains, hydrating fruits and vegetables, and essential oils offer important nutrients, vitamins, and minerals necessary for healthy hair. Here’s what you need to eat to grow luscious locks:

**Protein** is the building block of hair that provides strength and reduces the chances of breakage and split ends. Choose fish, poultry, turkey, lean meat, legumes, eggs, and soy as good protein sources.

**The mineral zinc** builds hair protein. Get zinc naturally from foods such as meat, eggs, and seafood, especially oysters; whole grains and wheat germ; pumpkin, sunflower, and squash seeds; nuts, and beans.

**Vitamins A, B-complex, and C** are important for hair growth, colour, shine, and a healthy scalp. Get these vitamins from fruit, vegetables (particularly bright orange vegetables), whole grains, lean meat, poultry, fish, organ meats, beans, and eggs.

**Biotin**, part of the B-complex family of vitamins, is necessary for healthy hair. Good sources of biotin include brewer’s yeast, brown rice, bulgur, green peas, lentils, oats, soybeans, sunflower seeds, and walnuts.

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**Avocado hair mask**

Avocados contain vitamins A, C, E, iron, potassium, niacin, protein, and oils, which all help to provide good nutrition for your hair. In a small bowl, mash and mix one avocado with one egg yolk and 1/2 tsp (2 mL) olive oil. Use half an avocado for short hair. Immediately apply mixture to hair and let sit for 30 minutes or more; then rinse and shampoo.
Flaxseed oil treatment

Pour 1 to 2 Tbsp (15 to 30 mL) flaxseed oil into your hand and brush it through your hair, distributing oil evenly. Don a shower cap and leave it on at least 30 minutes. For a more intense treatment, wear your oily shower cap overnight. Refrigerate flaxseed oil to keep it fresh.

Vitamin E gives your hair shine. Incorporate nuts, seeds, vegetable oil, wheat germ, soybeans, and leafy green vegetables into your diet.

Essential fatty acids such as omega-3 fats help improve hair texture and prevent dry, brittle hair. Be sure to eat fatty fish such as salmon and sardines, flaxseed, flax and hemp oils, walnuts, and almonds.

The mineral silica gives hair beauty, shine, and strength. Get silica from whole grains; vegetables such as potatoes, green and red peppers, cucumbers, sprouts, horsetail extract, and herbal tea.

Water provides hydration to produce more silky, shiny, and manageable hair. Drink eight 8-ounce glasses each day.

While you’re waiting for good nutrition to build healthy hair, restore your mané’s natural beauty and shine with a hair mask once a week. Make one at home (see sidebar) or buy one at your health food store.

Reap the benefits of healthful nutrients, vitamins, and minerals and throw away those expensive hair-revitalizing products. Your hair will thank you.

Alana Gold, RD, is a registered dietitian who uses her nutrition expertise to educate others about health and wellness issues.