

Hair Extensions

Hair extensions are lengths of either real or synthetic hair that can be affixed close to the scalp through a number of systems. When well matched in color and texture, and professionally applied by a competent extensionist, hair extensions mix in and move naturally with your own hair, making it difficult to tell you are wearing them. They can provide volume, extend hair, and add highlights or lowlights without the harshness of coloring your own hair. Some extensions can be worn continuously for up to 3 months before requiring maintenance.

Hair extensions come in many colors, textures, styles and lengths to match any hair type. Natural or human hair extensions are more expensive because they can be colored, set, curled, treated and reused. Synthetic hair will melt if exposed to the high temperatures of a [curling iron](#) or a hot blow dryer; it is used as purchased, and is generally not recommended. Synthetic extenders are available widely at department stores. Human hair extensions are generally purchased through salons that provide extensionist services.

Here is a quick look at the different methods of applying hair extensions:

Braids, Cornrows, Twists, Locks - Integrates extensions in a visible way in that the braided attachment is seen but blends into the hairstyle.

Weaves - Tiny braids hold hair extensions against the scalp, like cornrows, except these braids are hidden. A concern with this method is that it applies tension and uneven weight to the natural hair where attached, especially when washing the hair or when wet from swimming or other activities. This can not only loosen the weave but it can tug on your natural hair and if great care is not taken, break it. It can also be difficult to dry the hair beneath the braids and some people will avoid washing their hair as often.

Bonding - The extensions used for this method have a latex plug meant to be glued to your own hair for short terms use. Because this method is fast it's also inexpensive. However, to remove extensions, [oil](#) and heat must be used to dissolve the bonding agent, which is messy and time consuming. If not removed with care the latex can pull your own hair out.

Metal Tubing - Uses a metal tube clamped over the real hair to attach extension hair. In some cases it *can* break off real hair, can be difficult to pry open later, and adds additional weight to hair. Experts don't recommend this method for fine hair.

Heat-Shrink Tubing - This method won't harm natural hair but doesn't have a lot of adhesive for holding power needed for extended wear. After a few washings, the tubes can loosen, releasing strands, which then allows even more extension hair to fall out.

Adhesive-Based Fusion - This method is arguably the best, though the type of adhesive used is critical. Wax-based adhesives have a low melting point so a professional grade adhesive is a must. These adhesives can withstand both heat and chemical treatments. The adhesive remover that is used to remove the hair extensions dries the bonding agent to a powdery substance (rather than dissolving it through messy oil and heat).

Hair extensions have become very popular in the last 10 years with many celebrities taking advantage of the instant volume and length. Jennifer Aniston, Sandra Bullock, Nicole Kidman, Halle Berry and Paris Hilton are just a few famous women who have worn hair extensions. However, this is an expensive process and there are a few things to watch for.

An inexperienced extensionist can make poor choices that could result in damage to your own hair. The wrong type of extensions, the wrong method of attachment, or a poor job of attachment can break off your hair. The extensionist should know how to carefully test your hair for strength so that it is not taxed by the method used. Cutting, placement and many other factors come into play to get a natural, great looking head of hair.

The decision to get hair extensions represents a substantial financial commitment of approximately \$150.00 up to \$2,000 initially, depending on how many extensions, what type and method, etc. This will be augmented with professional products to keep the extensions and your own hair healthy, and regular trips to the salon for maintenance. Note that as your own hair grows out the extensions need to be redone. For a good result, the experts have some tips:

Extensionists should be licensed [cosmetologists](#). Since there are many methods of applying hair extensions (and many types of hair extensions) it's to your advantage to find a professional who has experience in several different methods, and not just one. Extensionists generally work off commission so they will naturally want to sell you on a method they know. If they only know one method it may not be the best one for your hair. Also, the extensionist should be able to show you certificates received from classes taken for each different method. Ask for a portfolio and see if you can't meet with a few clients who have extensions of the type and method recommended to you. How many people he or she has done *with this method*? Experts say a good answer is somewhere near thirty.

If interested in hair extensions speak to at least 2 professionals about your specific needs and concerns and get a written estimate of what they would do and how much it would cost. New methods will no doubt come to light and it's always wise to get more than one opinion before committing to something that will represent a substantial investment of time and money.

This article is intended for informational purposes only and decisions should not be based on its content alone.

