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# BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

## 6 Minute English

### The wonders of hair



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*NB: This is not a word-for-word transcript*

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**Neil**

Welcome to 6 Minute English, where today we introduce a hair-raising topic and six items of vocabulary.

**Tim**

I'm Tim... So what's hair-raising about today's topic, Neil? **Hair-raising** means scary but also exciting!

**Neil**

We're talking about hair – which may be exciting for some, but definitely won't be scary.

**Tim**

Hair-raising is a real thing, though, isn't it? Our hairs do rise!

**Neil**

Yes – Tim, they do. We get goose bumps when we're cold, scared, or excited.

**Tim**

But other mammals do it better than us – Cats fluff up when they see other cats they don't like.

**Neil**

That's true – We can't fluff up because we don't have enough body hair.

**Tim**

I suppose we used to be as hairy as gorillas – if you go back a million years or so.

**Neil**

Do you know why we lost so much hair, Tim?

**Tim**

Isn't it because it allowed us to sweat more easily? This meant we didn't get so hot and tired – we could run faster and for longer – and catch more animals to eat!

**Neil**

That sounds like a good theory. But do you have a theory on how many hair follicles the human body has today?

**Tim**

What's a hair follicle?

**Neil**

A **hair follicle** is the organ that produces a hair underneath the skin. Now answer the question, Tim. How many hair follicles does the human body have today? Is it ...

- a) 500,000,
- b) 5 million or
- c) 50 million?

**Tim**

50 million sounds about right.

**Neil**

Did you know that men have more than women, Tim?

**Tim**

No, I didn't – but it makes sense since men are usually hairier than women.

**Neil**

On their faces – but not necessarily on their heads!

**Tim**

Are you referring to the fact that men of a certain age can be follically challenged?

**Neil**

If you're follically challenged it means you're losing your hair! Having little or no hair is called **baldness**. And if you've reached **a certain age** it means you aren't young any more!

**Tim**

Why is our hair so important to us, Neil? When we aren't worrying about going bald, we're busy shaving, waxing, plucking, and trimming the stuff. When I say 'we' of course I'm referring to people in general. Not myself...

**Neil**

Well, a good head of hair indicates health and youth. And hair on your face – **facial** hair – shows when boys have reached manhood.

**Tim**

On the other hand, going grey or losing your hair shows you're getting older.

**Neil**

Hair today, gone tomorrow?

**Tim**

Bad joke, Neil!

**Neil**

Sorry! It's true that hair on your head shows signs of aging – but this isn't true of all human hair. Let's listen to Ralf Paus, a leading hair loss researcher, talking about this.

**INSERT**

**Ralf Paus, hair loss researcher**

The eyebrows get stronger usually in aging men, the hairs in your nose and in your ears get stronger – and what a miracle of nature that an organ – when the entire body is aging actually grows stronger. So we may even be able to learn from hair follicles how not to age.

**Tim**

Hmm. I'm not sure I would swap a good head of hair for thick eyebrows and nose hair. How about you, Neil?

**Neil**

I agree! But let's hear more from Ralf Paus about why some hair gets stronger as you get older.

**INSERT**

**Ralf Paus, hair loss researcher**

The hair follicle apparently knows some tricks that the other organs don't know. So it's continuously regenerating itself. It goes through a so-called hair cycle and part of that we know pretty well – and that is, these stem cells that it uses to regenerate cells.

**Tim**

So a hair follicle can **regenerate** cells – or grow new cells to replace old or damaged ones. But if that's only true for eyebrows, nose and ear hair, I am not that impressed! I want hairs on my head to be able to regenerate!

**Neil**

The important thing here is that these cells in the hair follicle may help scientists discover a way to stop other organs of the body aging... OK, I'm now going to reveal how many hair follicles on average we have on our bodies. The answer is... 5 million.

**Tim**

Oh. So not 50 million then.

**Neil**

Don't worry, Tim! It was a tricky question! Now let's go over the words we learned today.

**Tim**

'Hair-raising' means scary often in an exciting way. For example, "That ride on the rollercoaster was a hair-raising experience!"

**Neil**

Next is 'hair follicle' – the organ that produces a hair underneath the skin.

**Tim**

"Scientists believe that stress can affect hair follicles."

**Neil**

A number of things can affect hair follicles actually – age, disease, diet...

**Tim**

OK – but we haven't got all day, Neil. So let's move on to the next item. 'Baldness' – which means having little or no hair on your head.

**Neil**

"My grandfather is bald and he always wears a hat to cover his baldness."

**Tim**

Nice example. Is your grandpa actually bald, Neil?

**Neil**

No – he has a fine head of hair. Now, if you are a certain age, it means you are no longer young. For example...

**Tim**

"All the people at the party were of a certain age..."

**Neil**

How many of them had facial hair, Tim? That's our next word, and 'facial' means to do with the face.

**Tim**

"None of the people at the party had facial hair." There's your answer!

**Neil**

That's unusual, Tim. Lots of men have beards these days. OK – our final word for today is 'regenerate' which means to grow again. You can talk about regenerating a range of things, for example...

**Neil**

"The council has plans to regenerate this part of the city."

**Tim**

"Regeneration of parts of the city is in progress." – 'regeneration' is the noun.

**Neil**

Well, it's time to go now. But if today's show gave you goosebumps please let us know by visiting our Twitter, Facebook and YouTube pages and telling us about it!

**Tim**

Bye-bye!

**Neil**

Goodbye!