

# Ditching dye: How to go gray, gracefully

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Debbie Carlson/Tribune Newspapers

A guide to going gray: Are you ready to give up your hair color?

For years women (and some men) dyed their hair when it turned gray, but there's a growing trend of women embracing a more natural shift in hair color.

The deciding factors include getting tired of the time and expense of getting hair colored, a desire to avoid the chemicals used to color-treat hair, a different view of beauty — or all of these reasons. Social media sites like the idea-sharing website Pinterest have many pages showing women of all ages proudly wearing gray hair, and at all lengths, too.

For women who want to ditch the dye and transition to gray, hairdressers said there are a few ways to make this happen. Like any change with hair, be prepared for it to take a little time.

"They have to know going into it, it's a process and just to have patience with it," said Amanda Vaczi, director of Clique Salon in Houston. "It's no different than if you have a short, pixie haircut and you want to grow it out, you're going to go through some stages that you're not comfortable with. It's going to be the same as transitioning out from a single-process hair color to embracing your gray."

The first few weeks of the roots growing out is the most frustrating time, Vaczi said, as the line between the dyed hair color and gray can be stark, depending on the darkness of the dye. To deal with that, she said, women can buy headbands or other hair accessories to help cover the roots for the time being.

How quick and easy it is to go natural depends on length of hair and color, said Jill Crosby, a celebrity stylist whose regular clients include Diane Keaton, Julie Bowen, Melissa McCarthy and Allison Janney.

A woman with a short, layered hairstyle could go gray in four to six months, Crosby said, as keeping hair trimmed helps to cut away the old color.

Vaczi and Crosby said it's easier for women with blond hair to move to gray than for women who have darker colors. With blond hair, a stylist can weave in highlights to let the new growth mingle with the former color. That's what Crosby said she did when she helped Keaton transition to gray hair.

"Each time the client comes back to get her hair moved through transformation we do less," Crosby said. "The outgrowth makes a natural transition."

For women with darker-colored hair, a colorist may weave in lowlights to allow the gray to come in. Depending on the texture of the hair, Crosby said she might use a color remover.

"It would remove the depth of color," she said. "I would then replace it with a lighter color to get closer to the gray and then lowlight and weave it back in," she said.

Crosby said the process to go gray is the same for women of all ethnicities, as a colorist looks at the texture of hair and the hair cuticle. Thicker hair lets the hairstylist be a little more aggressive with hair-color processing, while the colorist needs to be more careful with thin hair, which can break.

For women who want to go gray cold turkey or who have always used hair color from a box at the drugstore, Vaczi and Crosby offered some tips.

Vaczi said to stop using shampoo that is for color-treated hair. Shampoos that aren't marketed as color-protectors can start to strip away color.

For home colorists, semi- and demi-permanent colors are another option and will last about a dozen or so shampoos.

"It will give it a more translucent color and won't have as high of a chemical or peroxide level" as permanent color, she said.

Clariol Professional Beautiful Collection, \$5.99, is one example of a semi-permanent color that washes out after 12 shampoos.

Crosby and Vaczi said another option is to use root covers, such as coverage sticks or powders. These can be put in hair for short-term color and then washed out.

"A woman may not care about growing out her roots, but she may have a great dinner she's going to and wants a tool to cross that bridge. (Root covers are) an amazing product to use," Crosby said.

There are several root cover brands out there, and Crosby said she likes Oribe's Airbrush Root Touch-Up Spray, \$29.

Both Vaczi and Crosby said as the natural gray grows in, it will be easier to see how much is gray and how much of the hair has an underlying color. Special shampoos can help even out the tone of gray hair, they said, to cancel out the brassiness or yellowness of gray, and bring out the brighter and whiter part of natural gray.

Vaczi said she likes Aveda's Blue Malva, \$33, which she said is very gentle. Another option is Paul Mitchell's Blonde Platinum Blonde Shampoo, \$13.50.

Both of these special shampoos should only be used once or twice a week.

Women "don't want to make it their everyday shampoo," Vaczi said. "If they have truly white hair, their hair would take on the blue or violet undertone. So it ends up canceling out the brassy and it shows in the hair."

*Debbie Carlson is a freelance writer.*

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