

DURING the run-up to the Royal wedding in April, media focus turned to Prince William's thinning hair. Then, at a reception, the groom's father, Prince Charles, who is balding himself, joked: "It must be hereditary!"

Well, look around at the members of your family. If many of them have shiny pates, perhaps you should start resigning yourself to a similar fate.

Experts at Svenson, a professional hair and scalp-care company, say hair loss is "genetically linked". Both parents can be responsible for your thinning hair, although other factors come into play. An unhealthy lifestyle and stress can lead to weakened hair roots and follicles, which results in scalp damage and eventual hair loss. Svenson has partnered HairDX, a US pharmagenomics company that specialises in genetic analysis and hair therapies, to introduce "a genetic test" that eliminates the guesswork for those predisposed to hair loss, in Malaysia.

This diagnostic test, launched in the United States in 2008, can determine a genetic predisposition to hair loss before the physical signs are visible, says Teo Kim Teik, chief trichologist of Svenson Asia and vice-president of the Asian Society of Trichology.

"With genetic diagnosis, it will be much easier for our trichologists to tailor an effective, preventive treatment programme for the individual."

The test is done using a non-invasive cheek swab, which is then sent to a US laboratory. The results available about two weeks later.

Presently, diagnosis of hair loss is based on physical observation. By the time you can see signs of thinning hair, about 50% of the hair volume would be gone!

"HairDX has genetic scientists and hair dermatologists from over 25 countries," says Dr Sharon Keene, its chief medical officer.

Statistics show that the most prevalent

Genetic? You can give nature a hand



Early detection can stem the problem, says Dr Sharon Keene.



Neeta Gosalia says stress has an effect on thinning hair.



Genetic diagnosis can detect hair loss early, says Teo Kim Teik.

type of hair loss is androgenetic alopecia, which occurs in 30% of men by the time they turn 30, 50% of men by 50, and 50% of women by 60.

Both the genders are at risk of developing androgenetic alopecia (63%). But young adults are not spared; 32% of those aged between 17 and 26 are predisposed to this problem.

Early detection and treatment of hair loss can help you stop losing more hair, says Dr Keene.

"Hair loss is often reflective of our health. It can be related to nutritional deficiency, thyroid disease or an underlying pathological condition that we may not be aware of."

Sometimes people "just keep waiting" for their hair to grow back, without realising that although there are "very effective" therapies that can stop hair loss. "Finding a way to regrow hair is a little trickier than preventing hair loss."

Dr Keene notes that women have it harder when their hair goes. "When we see bald men, we just think they look older. But when women have thinning hair, our first thought is - 'Are they are sick?'"

A consultant from Yun Nam Hair Care in Kuala Lumpur says as a person ages, hair growth slows down significantly.

"When hair follicles become dormant, hair stops growing. It then starts thinning and, eventually, baldness occurs."

The "hot spots" for male hair loss are the crown and forehead. In women, hair thinning occurs at the hairline and over the whole the head.

Typically, elderly men suffer from Mediterranean hair loss (at the top or back of the head), M-shaped hair loss (which leads to Mediterranean hair loss if not treated) and greying hair.

"Topical application of hair lotion or tonic

is not sufficient to treat hair loss. You should also treat the root of the problem," says Neeta Gosalia, founder of Neeta's Herbal, a hair solution centre with 33 outlets worldwide.

"Many people give up trying after some failed attempts and get depressed. Thinning hair becomes a major hindrance to them in their daily lives."

She cautions that hair products (with chemicals) such as mousse, gel and colourants can also cause hair loss. Bleaching, colouring, perming and straightening your hair too often can dry and break it too.

Neeta started losing her hair at 17. Unlike her, her five sisters had lovely hair. At 18, out of desperation, she went to New Delhi for ayurvedic treatment, which uses herbs to treat the scalp. Her hair grew back! Since then, she has been practising herbal therapy for the past 23 years.

At her London centre, Neeta has six clients who started losing their hair after their divorce. "It has to do with the stress of a marriage breaking down," she says.

Children who suffer from illnesses can also suffer hair loss and alopecia areata or patchy or ring-like baldness. Mothers who have been through a traumatic experience, like losing a child, can find themselves losing hair too. "It can happen overnight," Neeta says.

If the scalp is not thoroughly clean and has residues of chlorine (from regular sessions at the swimming pool, for example), fungus can grow and result in patchy hair loss. Excessive sweating and dandruff can also cause problems.

Hormonal imbalance is another factor. Similarly, medication for health problems can result in a thinning pate.

"But patients can begin hair treatment after completing their medical treatment," Neeta says. "A proper diet, healthy lifestyle and minimal stress are important factors for healthy hair."