

Guys talk grooming

It's no longer a taboo subject

By Olivia Barker
USA TODAY

Does he ... or doesn't he? Only his dermatologist knows for sure if a man's on Propecia, the baldness drug — but other guys are wondering.

Ditto whether he's unfurrowing his forehead with Botox. Or brightening his mug with microdermabrasion.

Women have long tittered about whether a friend has gotten Botox or a nose job, but now guys are forming their own gossip networks, and products are popping up to fan the flames.

John Edwards is still doing follicular damage control for his penchant for \$400 Beverly Hills haircuts. The coif gaffe, which made headlines this spring, is the framework for the July/August *Men's Vogue* cover story on the presidential candidate. And it gets a mention in *Esquire's* August cover profile.

But beneath the ridicule of Edwards' Ken-doll persona, there's envy. The number of men who have non-surgical cosmetic procedures is on the rise. In 2006, 202% more men had a Botox shot vs. in 2000, 112% more had their skin sloughed via microdermabrasion, and 49% more had it resurfaced with lasers, according to the American Society of Plastic Surgeons.

Male vanity is thriving, if on more of a sotto voce level.

"Guys are always scoping out other guys, saying, 'That's a transplant, that's Propecia, that guy's wearing a wig,'" says *Men's Health* fashion and grooming director Brian Boye. "Whether in the locker room or restaurant or while watching TV, they've got one eye on what everyone else is doing, what looks good and what doesn't look good."

Today's tress talk is about "trying to gauge how far we as a sex are willing to go to improve our looks," Boye says. "We're trying to gauge how acceptable it is, and it is definitely becoming more acceptable."

"But we're still nervous to talk about what we're doing until we get sense of what everyone else is doing."



Above, *Esquire*; left, Elemis; right, Sephora

In the news: John Edwards' grooming habits are magazine fodder, but average guys can spiff up, too. Try Elemis' Time for Men Time Defense Wrinkle Delay (\$93) and Eye Reviver (\$65); Ace dual-action tweezers (\$7.99); or Peter Thomas Roth Un-Wrinkle eye formula (\$100).

Guys are going to great lengths to save some of their hair — and lose other strands. Because "uni-brows" are unseemly, Ace, maker of the classic barber comb, is launching a men's grooming line in September that includes testosterone-friendly tweezers fashioned from blackened stainless steel. With a wider grip and diamond texture, they look "a lot like tools," Ace brand manager Christin Hartsfield says. "Like a Maglite flashlight."

Then there's the Philips Norelco Bodygroom, a razor for "manscaping" below the beard, which launched last year with a cheeky Web ad, Shaveeverywhere.com. The site was updated last month with a mockumentary about the history of male deforestation, starring a medieval-looking device called the Tuft B-Gone and its creator, Frank "Furback" Sack.

Guys also are jumping on the anti-aging buzzword brigade, targeting creases such as crow's feet. Elemis' Time for Men line launched this month and includes a wrinkle reducer and an eye reviver. Male-marketed Peter Thomas Roth introduced a crow's feet fighter in May.

But instead of getting advice from a woman wielding \$20 lip balm at a department store counter, men are receiving it from their friends. Longtime Propecia popper Cory Gnazzo, a Manhattan TV producer, says the chatter in his circle runs along the lines of, "So-and-so should be on it," because you notice when people are not.

"If it's someone I know well, I will tell them, 'Seriously, you should look into it,'" says Gnazzo, 37. Sporting a full head of close-cropped hair, Gnazzo is unusual in that he's "very open" about his \$50-a-month habit.

David Colbert will readily admit he's a patient, too — in part because he's a prescriber. The Manhattan dermatologist, 41, has been on Propecia since it came out; "probably several thousand" of his patients have tried it.

"My brother's bald, but I'm not," he says. He's seeing a shift in perception. "There was a point in time when people weren't telling other people they were on it," Colbert says. Now, as Propecia use spreads from urban centers to Middle America, "I don't think there's any stigma to it at all ... It's just part of routine maintenance."