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Hair by hair, extensions give lashes oomph

Baltimore Sun
By **Tanika White**
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Tired of their puny, wimpy lashes or the fake ones that make them look like Vegas showgirls, some women are opting for another solution: eyelash extensions.

In the last year, this new beautification process -- gluing synthetic or animal hair extensions to natural lashes -- has picked up steam in salons and spas in [Baltimore](#) and across the country.

'It's a very, very, very hot trend,' says Victoria Kirby, beauty editor at Allure magazine. 'Everybody from Lindsay Lohan to Jennifer Lopez has them. Madonna has ones that she puts on before a show that have diamonds on the ends.'

Most average women skip the bling, but even without diamonds, eyelash extensions still are expensive. The semi-permanent lashes, which cost from \$200 to \$600 for a full application (depending on the salon), last up to two months.

Experts say the high price is justified because the process is painstaking, involving a kind of precision that its closest cousin, hair extensions, doesn't. Applications can take anywhere from two hours to three hours to complete.

'This is not a product that can be picked up by anybody and applied,' says Matt Daoudi, spokesman for Houston-based Xtreme Lashes, one of a handful of companies that provide the materials and eyelash extension training for salons. 'It's a very, very tedious procedure. It requires a lot of skill and teaching to do it right.'

Here's how it works: In a salon or spa, a trained aesthetician carefully glues anywhere from 20 to 80 individual lashes directly on to a woman's own lashes. The synthetic or animal hair lashes -- which are of varying sizes and shades -- are glued near the lash base and extend out past the end of a woman's natural lashes, creating a longer, fuller

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look.

Many women say they don't need to wear mascara or eyeliner once they have extensions. And the look lasts anywhere from four to eight weeks, with intermediary 'touch-ups' every two to three weeks.

'The results are wonderful,' says Rena Marmaras, manager of Honey Bee Diner, who tried eyelash extensions for the first time about a month ago at About Faces Day Spa and Salon in [Towson](#). 'They look very natural. My boyfriend hasn't noticed. I get up in the morning and he just looks at me and he says, 'Wow! You look so good.' I love that.'

Eyelash extensions, unlike the stuck-on false eyelashes of yesteryear, have a more natural look, experts say.

'That's why the trend has really translated to the average person, because it's so wearable. It's not just a Hollywood look,' Kirby says. 'Fake lashes, they can tend to look too dramatic. They look a little drag-queenish. Whereas the lash extensions, if they're done properly, they look exactly like real lashes. So it's a much more realistic way to get that dramatic effect.'

Eyelash extensions began making their way to the mainstream about a year and a half ago, says Helga Surratt, co-owner and president of the About Faces salon.

'We saw the trend coming through magazines and television; actresses were talking about it,' Surratt says. 'In February, March, we started trying it out on employees and then our customers. The response has been great.'

But even before Hollywood celebrities such as Paris Hilton started flaunting their extended lashes, the process first got its start much farther away.

'The actual procedure originated in Asia,' says Daoudi, of Xtreme Lashes. 'Asians usually have shorter lashes. And they developed eyelash extensions probably about four years ago.'

Xtreme Lashes started about two years ago, and the company has grown faster than the blink of an eye.

'The celebrities kind of publicized it and then it filtered down to everybody else,' Daoudi says. 'We went pretty much in a year's time from a [small business](#) with three or four people working to 40 people working for the company. And then it became this international phenomenon. We're in Ireland, the [United Kingdom], Australia. I probably get two or three requests a day from other countries wanting to try the product.'

Daoudi says that the company is very selective about who can carry its product and administer the procedure, because safety is key when applying eyelash extensions.

Eye doctors agree.

'I think it's fine to glue things to the eyelash,' says Elliott Myrowitz, an [optometrist](#) and an assistant professor of [ophthalmology](#) at Johns Hopkins Medical Institutions' Wilmer Eye Institute. 'It's just when you're talking about people putting the glue in the eye directly, instead of getting it on the lash. [Doctors] use that same surgical glue. And just like it glues lashes, it'll hold tissue together. And if you glued the lashes shut, or if you got any on your cornea, it could be very problematic.'

Myrowitz, who isn't familiar with any problems associated with eyelash extensions, says the fact that the procedure is done at certified salons, and not at home, is reassuring.

Checking for a certified salon is important, says Kirby.

'There are a lot of things to consider when having this done,' she says. 'You want synthetic hair, not animal hair, because animal hairs can cause allergic reactions, and they're heavier. You want to make sure the salon uses surgical glue. And you want to make sure that you go to a salon where the technicians have been certified by Xtreme Lashes or Lavish Lashes. Those are the two companies that we know to be reputable.'

Xtreme Lashes has trained more than 2,000 people in the United States to apply lash extensions. There are only a few in the Baltimore area, listed on the company's Web site, which have been screened and approved.

And at About Faces, still more screening is done -- of the potential eyelash customer -- before applying the first lush lash.

'We don't just do it on anybody,' says Surratt, adding that they've given about 50 women the extensions. 'If the client is willing to maintain the lashes appropriately, then we'll do it.'

That's because the false lashes will fall out when the natural lash does, leaving the overall look a little scraggy. (Think Britney Spears' interview with [Matt Lauer](#). Yikes!) That's why Marmaras of Dulaney Valley says she plans to be at the salon every two to three weeks, getting more lashes applied.

'I'm 45 and single,' she says, laughing. 'And I have to keep up with these 20-year-old women.'

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