

Identifying Common Cosmetology Problems

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Quick-reference guide for students, instructors, and salon professionals

1. Overview

Cosmetology combines science, artistry, and client service. Early detection of problems keeps treatments safe, effective, and profitable. The following categories cover the most frequently encountered issues in a salon setting.

Category	Typical Signs	Underlying Causes	Immediate Action
Skin	Redness, itching, rashes, excessive oil or dryness, broken capillaries	Allergic reactions, improper pH, harsh chemicals, over-exfoliation, sun damage	Stop the treatment, rinse with cool water, document the reaction, advise client to seek medical care if needed
Hair	Breakage, split ends, excessive shedding, scalp flaking, uneven color	Chemical over-processing, heat damage, poor nutrition, improper rinsing, product buildup	Assess the damage level, recommend a repair protocol (deep conditioning, protein treatment), adjust future service plan
Nails	Soft or brittle plates, discoloration, peeling, onycholysis, fungal odor	Moisture imbalance, harsh solvents, improper filing, infection, nutritional deficiency	Remove polish, sanitize tools, apply protective barrier, refer to dermatologist if infection suspected
Eyebrows/Lashes	Irritation, swelling, loss of hairs, uneven growth	Over-tweezing, improper adhesive use, allergic reaction to tint, infection	Stop the procedure, apply cool compress, use sterile tools, advise client on after-care
Sanitation & Equipment	Unusual odors, residue on tools, cross-contamination signs	Inadequate cleaning, expired disinfectants, improper storage	Re-sanitize equipment, review SOPs, retrain staff on infection-control protocols

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Client Communication	Repeated complaints, missed appointments, vague symptom descriptions	Misunderstood expectations, lack of education, language barriers	Clarify service scope, provide written after-care instructions, use visual aids or translation tools

2. Skin-Specific Problems

Problem	Description	Key Indicators	Common Triggers	Recommended Response
Contact Dermatitis	Inflammatory reaction to a product or ingredient	Red, itchy patches; sometimes blisters	New dyes, fragrances, preservatives	Discontinue product, rinse with lukewarm water, apply hypoallergenic soothing gel, document and report
Acne Flare-Ups	Pimples or cysts after facial or makeup	Pustules, papules, especially around T-zone	Heavy occlusive masks, comedogenic oils	Use non-comedogenic products, keep area clean, suggest a follow-up with a dermatologist
Hyperpigmentation	Dark spots after exfoliation or laser	Uneven melanin patches	Over-exfoliation, sun exposure without SPF	Recommend gentle brightening serum, sunscreen, avoid aggressive treatments for 2–4 weeks
Rosacea Triggers	Flushed, burning skin	Persistent redness, visible blood vessels	Hot water, alcohol, spicy foods, certain acids	Switch to soothing, fragrance-free formulas; advise client on lifestyle triggers

3. Hair-Specific Problems

Problem	Description	Visual Cues	Typical Causes	Fix-It Steps
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Protein Overload	Hair feels stiff, straw?like, snaps easily	Rigid shaft, lack of elasticity	Repeated protein masks, high? protein products	Follow with moisturizing treatment, use low?protein shampoo for 1–2 weeks
Moisture Deficiency				