

Shampoo **101**



Introduction

Proper cleansing is one of the most important steps in any Afro-textured hair care routine, yet it's often misunderstood or overlooked. Many believe shampoo dries out natural hair or that co-washing is enough. This guide will help you separate fact from fiction so you can build a healthier relationship with your hair and scalp.

Understanding the Scalp

Your scalp is the foundation of healthy hair growth. When it's clean and balanced, your follicles can thrive. When it's clogged or irritated, hair issues like thinning, breakage, or stunted growth can arise. Signs of an unbalanced scalp include

- Itchiness
- Flakiness or dandruff
- Buildup or sticky residue
- Dryness or excessive oiliness



What Shampoo really does

Shampoo is designed to cleanse the scalp and remove dirt, oil, and product buildup using surfactants. These cleansing agents lift impurities so they can be rinsed away. Without shampoo, residue can build up, clog follicles, and hinder healthy growth.

The Types of Shampoo

Understanding the types of shampoo helps you make better choices:

- Clarifying: Deep-cleans buildup; use occasionally.
- Moisturizing: Hydrates dry hair; good for regular use.
- Sulfate-free: Gentler; ideal for dry or sensitive scalps.
- Medicated: Targets scalp conditions like dandruff.

How to Read a Shampoo Label

Don't be fooled by buzzwords like "natural" or "organic." Instead, look at the first five ingredients—these make up most of the formula. Look for clean, nourishing ingredients and avoid harsh detergents.

Choosing the Right Shampoo

Match shampoo to your needs:

- **Dry scalp?** Moisturizing formulas
- **Heavy buildup?** Clarifying occasionally
- **Itchy or flaky scalp?** Try medicated shampoos
- **Sensitive scalp?** Sulfate-free options



How Often Should You Shampoo

There's no one-size-fits-all schedule. Some wash weekly, others every 10-14 days. Listen to your scalp:

- **Is it itchy or flaky? Time to cleanse.**
- **Hair feels limp or greasy? Consider a wash.**

Natural & DIY Alternatives

Options like black soap or clay washes are popular but should be used carefully. Always patch test and check pH levels. They can be great additions to your routine—but aren't for everyone.

Common Issues & How to Fix Them

- Still dry after shampooing? Try pre-pooing or switching formulas.
- Flaky scalp? Add a scalp scrub or try a medicated shampoo.
- Tangles after washing? Section hair and avoid piling it on top of your head.

Ingredients to Avoid (and Why)

1. Silicones (Non-Water-Soluble)

Examples: Dimethicone, Cyclopentasiloxane

Why Avoid:

They coat the hair to create shine and smoothness but build up over time, especially if you're not using sulfates to remove them. This buildup can block moisture from entering the strand, causing dryness and breakage.

2. Drying Alcohols

Examples: Isopropyl Alcohol, Ethanol, SD Alcohol 40

Why Avoid:

These strip natural oils and dry out the hair and scalp, leading to brittle strands and frizz. Not to be confused with fatty alcohols (like cetyl or stearyl alcohol), which are moisturizing.

3. Synthetic Fragrances

Listed as: "Fragrance" or "Parfum"

Why Avoid:

These can irritate the scalp, especially in sensitive individuals, and are often made from undisclosed chemicals. They may worsen conditions like eczema, psoriasis, or dryness.

4. Parabens

Examples: Methylparaben, Propylparaben

Why Avoid:

Used as preservatives, parabens may disrupt hormone function and have been linked to long-term health concerns. They're not directly harmful to the hair shaft but are best avoided when possible.

5. Mineral Oil & Petrolatum

Why Avoid:

While they seal in moisture, they also block out moisture, especially if used regularly without clarifying washes. They can cause buildup on the scalp and prevent water-based hydration from penetrating.

Why Sulfates Can Be Necessary (When Used Correctly)

What are Sulfates?

Sulfates like Sodium Lauryl Sulfate (SLS) or Sodium Laureth Sulfate (SLES) are cleansing agents that create lather and remove dirt, oil, and product buildup.

Why They're Demonized:

- They're very effective at cleansing—sometimes too effective.
- On Afro-textured or dry hair, frequent use can strip natural oils and cause dryness.

But Here's the Truth:

- Sulfates are necessary occasionally—especially if you use heavy products like oils, butters, or silicones.
- Without them, build-up accumulates, blocking moisture and leading to limp, dull, or breakage-prone hair.
- A monthly or occasional sulfate wash is great to reset the scalp and remove buildup.

Balanced Recommendation:

- Use sulfate-free shampoos most of the time
- Use a gentle sulfate shampoo once every few weeks or when doing a deep cleanse
- Always follow with a deep conditioner

It's not about banning sulfates—it's about knowing when and how to use them. A healthy routine uses gentle, moisturizing products while still clearing away buildup when needed. For Afro-textured hair, balance is everything.

Shampoo is not your enemy—it's your ally. Learning how to use it correctly unlocks the first step to healthier hair. Want to go even deeper?

Check out our full Afro-Textured Hair Cleansing 101 Online Program to master your entire wash day routine with expert guidance and detailed video tutorials.

Start your healthy hair journey today.

Types of Shampoo

Clarifying Shampoo

A clarifying shampoo is a type of shampoo that is designed to remove product buildup, dirt and oil from the hair. It is usually stronger than regular shampoo and can be used to restore the normal pH balance of the scalp. It can also be used to remove chlorine and other chemicals from the hair after swimming.

Moisturizing Shampoo

A moisturizing shampoo is a type of shampoo that helps to add moisture and hydration to your hair. It usually contains ingredients such as hyaluronic acid, glycerin, and panthenol, which help to attract and retain moisture in the hair. Moisturizing shampoos can help to keep your hair soft and manageable, and can help to prevent damage from styling and the environment.

Sulfate Free Shampoo

A sulfate free shampoo is a type of shampoo that does not contain sulfates. Sulfates are a type of surfactant commonly used in shampoos to provide a rich lather and remove dirt, oil, and build-up. Sulfate free shampoos are milder and can be beneficial for people with sensitive scalps or those who frequently color their hair.

Conditioning Shampoo

Conditioning shampoo is a type of shampoo that contains a higher concentration of conditioning agents like silicones, oils, and humectants. These agents create a protective layer on the hair shaft, helping to soften and detangle the hair. Conditioner shampoos can help improve the look and feel of dry, damaged, and color-treated hair, making it easier to manage and style.

Conditioner (co wash)

A conditioner wash is a type of hair care routine that uses a conditioning product in place of shampoo to cleanse the hair. It is a gentler way of cleansing the hair as it does not strip away natural oils and can help to improve the overall health of the hair. It is best to use a conditioner wash in combination with a traditional shampoo to maintain a healthy balance.





Shampoo Ingredients

The main ingredients in shampoo typically include water, surfactants, conditioning agents, preservatives, fragrances, and optional colorants.

Surfactants

Surfactants are the most important ingredients in shampoo as they are responsible for cleaning the hair and scalp. Common surfactants used in shampoo include Sodium Lauryl Sulfate (SLS), Sodium Laureth Sulfate (SLES) and Ammonium Lauryl Sulfate (ALS).

Conditioning Agents

Conditioning agents help to soften the hair and make it easier to style; these include cetyl alcohol, stearyl alcohol, and cyclomethicone.

Preservatives

Preservatives help to keep the shampoo fresh and free from bacteria; these include parabens, phenoxyethanol, and sodium benzoate.

Fragrance

Fragrances are added to give the shampoo a pleasant smell

Colorants

colorants can be added to give the shampoo a desired hue.

