Going Back to Your Roots

A stress-free transition from relaxed to natural is possible if you give delicate African-American tresses enough TLC.

May 25, 2010 By Willette Francis

It's not easy to maintain relaxed hair. First, you must visit the salon every six to eight weeks to straighten the new growth. Then you need to protect your chemically treated hair with visits to a beautician every two weeks for regular services such as deep conditioning and hot oil treatments. Plus, there's the hassle of paying for it all. Perhaps that's why so many women opt to go natural.

In 2003, that's exactly what a graduate-student-on-a-budget did when she could no longer afford costly salon visits to maintain her relaxed hair. "I started transitioning by wearing braids, which I put in myself—thanks to my little sister teaching me how before I left for school," she says.

After graduating in May 2005, she decided to start fresh and chopped off her straightened hair.

Since then, she made two additional big chops: once in 2007 after relaxing her hair again to get it cut and shaped into a pixie hairdo and then earlier this year just because she wanted a change. It's only hair, she says, it'll grow back.

Indeed it does. Women who want to transition to natural hair and need to cut off their relaxed locks can expect consistent hair growth. Hair grows at a monthly rate of about half an inch. This means, for example, that if the last time you relaxed your hair was four months ago, you've achieved about two inches of natural hair growth. So with a little math, you can calculate how long it'll take to reach your desired length.

While the young woman didn't hesitate to cut off her relaxed hair, some women aren't ready to take such a drastic step. Instead, they choose to gradually transition, letting their natural curls grow in under the straightened locks.

"Cutting one's hair is something that you have to be comfortable with," says Titi and Miko Branch, founders of Miss Jessie's, a hair care collection developed for those with naturally curly, kinky and wavy hair. "Many women find themselves in this position, but there are a number of ways they can style their hair [while the natural curls grow in], such as using braids, weaves, twist sets, curly sets or straight styling."

Women who choose alternative styling options have to treat their hair with lots of TLC, the Branches say. Hair in transition is in a very delicate state because each strand consists of two distinct textures of hair—a more dense, tightly curled texture growing from the scalp, and a pin-straight, relaxed texture at its ends.

“Typically the point at which the natural hair and relaxed hair meet is a very fragile point,” the Branches explain. “Many women experience breakage at this line of demarcation.”

Can you prevent breakage when transitioning? Well, it depends on your hair’s texture as well as the way you handle these fragile strands while grooming and styling your mane.

“Every situation is different, but for the most part, hair that is prone to breakage does better when the hair is braided or contained,” the Branches say, adding that it’s in your best interest to consult a professional stylist if you’re not sure how to handle or style hair that’s two different textures.

But be prepared. A completed transition to natural locks doesn’t translate to easy hair maintenance. Natural hair is generally drier in texture. To avoid crunchy, crackly, prone-to-breakage curls, moisturizing is key. “Moisturize at every step of your hair care regimen with the right products, from shampoo to cleansing cream to the hairdress,” the Branches recommend.

But if you want to try a straight-hair style during transitioning—just for a change—you can. Just blow dry and flat iron the hair, but proceed with caution.

“Every time you want to wear your hair straight,” the Branches warn, “your hair becomes vulnerable to the enormous amount of heat required to straighten natural hair.”

But, straight up, if it’s just change you crave, there’s tons of different hair styles for girls with natural curls.

Stuff We Love
These products are worth every cent.

Miss Jessie’s Quick Curls
(8 oz., $32) This tube of deliciously scented cream defines curl shape, leaving hair soft and frizz-free.

Umberto Beverly Hills Banana Brush 201
($8.99) Suitable for all hair types, this brush gently detangles damp hair.

Salon Tech Silicone 450 Flatiron
($200) Three silicone bars simultaneously style and condition hair.

Mizani True Textures Perfect Curl Defining Cream Gel
(5 oz., $18) This gel-like cream reenergizes natural hair’s spirals.

Palmer’s Olive Oil Formula Moisturizing Hair Milk
(8.5 fl. oz., $6.50) This silky, olive oil–enriched lotion moisturizes and softens dry, frizzy hair.

Garnier Fructis Triple Nutrition Fortifying Shampoo and Fortifying Cream Conditioner
(13 oz., $3.99 each) Both products moisturize and nourish hair with three nutritious oils—olive, avocado and shea.

Miss Jessie’s Rapid Recovery Treatment
(12 oz., $48) Provides an intense deep-conditioning experience

---

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.
http://beta.docker.realhealthmag.com/article/Back-Roots-RHSUMMER2010-18466-8911