The Science Behind the Top 5 Hair Care Ingredients

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The list of ingredients in hair care products can sometimes seem like it's written in another language. With all that mumbo jumbo how can you tell what you're really putting in your hair? No worries, we've got you covered! With the help of a hair health report from scientist Ruby Majani, PhD, featured on fashion and beauty website Coco and Creme, here's the science behind the top five hair care ingredients.

Mineral Oil
What you probably think it is: A petroleum byproduct that locks out moisture and causes hair to dry out.
What it is: A widely used, colorless, odorless fossil fuel that's considered a natural product. Like all natural oils (coconut, castor, etc.), mineral oil forms a barrier on the hair that stops water from entering or exiting.
Function: Keeps tresses dry, straight and humidity-resistant.
Caution: Because mineral oil is one of the best water barriers, use sparingly on dry hair.

Silicone
What you probably think it is: An artificial product that builds up on hair and blocks out moisture.
What it is: A completely lab-made oil that's mostly used in shampoo to condition hair and reduce damage while cleansing. Silicone is also used to create "slip" in conditioners to allow for easy combing of the hair.
Function: Detangling aid and thermal-styling hair.
Caution: Because silicone is non-water soluble and can build up, use sparingly if you use a "no-poo" (no-shampoo) routine.

Sulfate
What you probably think it is: A harsh chemical that strips hair of moisture and natural oils.
What it is: Sodium lauryl sulfate (SLS) is a commonly used cleanser in shampoos. SLS can irritate skin so it's usually mixed with gentler cleansers.
Function: Rids hair of buildup.
Caution: Because it's so powerful, watch carefully for irritation and switch shampoos at the first sign of trouble.

Parabens

What you probably think it is: Cancer-causing chemicals.
What they are: Preservatives used in health and beauty products to prevent bacteria. (While their structure is similar to estrogen and they've been found in breast cancer tissue, parabens are not known to cause cancer.)
Function: Stops bacterial and fungal growth in shampoos and cosmetics.
Caution: Parabens have been found in breast cancer tissue, but they've not been classified as cancer-causing agents. If you're worried, though, opt for products with less alarming preservatives.

Glycerin
What you probably think it is: A moisture-robber that dries out hair.
What it is: A humectant, meaning it holds onto water, that moisturizes and strengthens natural hair (but not so for relaxed curls).
Function: Used to lock in moisture.
Caution: Glycerin can be natural or man-made.

What about the chemical ingredients in relaxers? Click here to learn more about your tresses' reaction to them.

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