Textured Tresses

Hair type issues: What's the best way to care for your waves, curls, coils and kinks?

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With celebrities like Oscar nominee Viola Davis, Grammy winner Esperanza Spalding and R&B singer Solange Knowles leading the charge, more sisters are ditching their perms, wigs and weaves for Afros, twists and locs.

But if you're thinking of joining the trend, then know this: A change of hair texture often requires a switch to new styling products and techniques as well.

This is what led Oprah's longtime hairstylist Andre Walker to create a hair care classification system for women with naturally curly tresses. His goal? To help women with textured hair create healthy and beautiful styles.

Walker's system assigns numbers to different hair types, from 1 to 4. In addition, the letters A, B or C after a hair type identify the strands' thickness, with A the thinnest and C the thickest.

But the four hair types Walker identified also guide the expertise of other African-American hair care experts, such as London-born Stephen Durham, founder and CEO of The Urban Therapy Salon. Durham launched a hair care line, Urban Therapy Twisted Sista, to address his biracial and multicultural clientele's hair concerns. He built his business by becoming an expert who could work with a variety of hair types, and then he created products specifically suited for these textures. Here, he explains the four different types.

Type 1: Straight Hair
This is the pin-straight kind most African-American women don't naturally have. This hair type lacks curls and waves and tends to be oily and shiny.

Type 2: Wavy Hair
Since black hair is typically more tightly coiled, not many African-American women sport this hair texture. Wavy-textured hair ranges from fine, thin and easy to style (think actress Scarlett Johansson) to thick, coarse and resistant to styling (think media personality Daisy Fuentes). "Type

2 hair requires the least amount of products," Durham advises, "so if you do use them they should be the lightest ones." Good examples of lightweight products include mousses or gels that don't weigh hair down.

Type 3: Curly Hair
"Most African-American hair falls into a 3, 3C or 4 category," Durham says. "Type 3 hair has a defined S pattern to it, or a squiggly curl. When hair has a loose curl, it doesn't require much product or styling."

Curly hair types should wash and condition their locks with sulfate-free products then apply good leave-in conditioners along with light-weight styling products such as creams, silicones and serums. This hair care regimen will help control frizz, Durham says.

Women with Type 3C hair have thicker strands. This type of curly, kinky hair sprouts from the scalp as tight corkscrew-like curls with plentiful strands tightly packed together. (Picture singer Alicia Keys or *Half & Half* TV show star Rachel True.) As with regular Type 3 hair, less is more when it comes to washing; conditioning is essential; and you should air-dry whenever possible, Durham suggests.

"For 3C hair, we often just use a serum to eliminate frizz," Durham says. "But if you're doing your hair yourself, you can add some leave-in conditioner and cream, and then use your fingers to twist your hair into ringlets."

If you choose to use a blow-dryer (with or without a diffuser), a pressing comb or a curling iron, though, here's some advice: Don't do it more than three times a week. "Heat will damage your hair," Durham warns, "so always put on a protective layer before you use heat."

Type 4: Kinky Hair
This hair type's strands are generally very tightly coiled with a visible curl pattern. (Entertainers Esperanza Spalding, Jill Scott and Erykah Badu all rock Type 4 hair.) When stretched, these tight coils may have an S pattern (4A) or a Z pattern (4C) with a less-defined curl.

Type 4 hair of all kinds requires the most amount of washing and moisturizing. "With S-pattern tresses, it's really about a great shampoo, an effective moisturizing conditioner and a good detangler to soften the hair and add a lot of moisture to it," Durham says.

Women with Type 4 hair can wear a classic Afro, or slightly blow-dry their hair and then curl it with hot curlers. Another option is to set their hair with rods and sit under a dryer, Durham says.

But whatever your hair type, don't forget to wash and condition tresses to keep hair from breaking. And always oil your scalp to avoid dryness. Why? Durham stresses the importance of this regimen: "The purpose is to keep moisture in the hair at all times so it stays bouncy and shiny."

That’s just plain ol’ good advice, no matter what type of hair you have.

Common Natural Hair Care Woes
The good news? Black hair is beautiful. The bad news? It’s also prone to dryness and breakage.

According to hair care expert Stephen Durham, even though African-American hair is fragile, you can keep your hair from breaking by simply remembering these easy to follow guidelines:

Washing hair too often may cause breakage. Durham understands that people want to rid their hair of product buildup, but he wouldn’t advise washing tresses more than twice each week. Why? Because shampooing too often can strip your scalp of natural oils that help maintain healthy follicles.

Watch what you eat. “A great diet does more for your hair and skin health than putting on products,” Durham says. He advises eating fish rich in omega-3s, or, if you’re vegetarian, downing flaxseed oil. “Also drink plenty of water,” he adds. “All of those things create stronger, shinier and healthier hair.”

Avoid tight braids. “Braids can cause really bad breakage,” Durham warns. “Breakage [particularly along the hairline] occurs when hair has been braided too tightly.”

Be careful while transitioning. Breakage can occur when people go from relaxed to natural hair. “The space where the two textures meet is the weakest point, and that’s where hair often snaps off,” Durham explains, “so people have to be careful there.” He recommends gradually cutting off the relaxed hair. “You don’t have to chop it all off in one go.”

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