Braid It, But Don’t Forget It

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Braids can encourage hair growth, protect your locks and add versatility to your style options. But while braids are easy to maintain and last on average about three months, it can be a challenge to keep them looking attractive. Livestrong.com offers these tips to help you do just that.

Wash braids once every two weeks. Use a mild, diluted shampoo—one without added conditioners. Thin the shampoo to make it easier to rinse from braids and reduce residue and build-up. (Reminder: The more you wash your hair the shorter the life of your braids.) Have scalp problems? Address the condition, and get your hair re-braided more frequently.

Condition braids after each wash. Use a mild, diluted conditioner on the area where braids merge with your natural hair. If you are wearing human-hair braids, condition strands to the end. Thoroughly rinse braids to avoid residue build-up on hair and scalp.

Don’t forget to deep condition. Treat your braids to a once-a-month treatment. Use store-bought conditioner, or concoct your own at home.

Dry hair—gently. Start with a towel to soak up excess water. Follow with a T-shirt twisted around your tresses to absorb additional moisture. Let braids hang loose to air dry. Then use a blow-dryer to be sure hair is completely dries—otherwise you risk mildew developing. (Note: Be extra careful when drying synthetic extensions.)

Moisturize the hair twice a week. First, massage the scalp to produce natural oils. Next, work natural oils to hair ends. Follow with moisturizer. If you have human hair braids, apply to the ends of strands. If you have synthetic hair braids, apply moisturizer to the area where they meet your natural hair. (Natural oils, such as coconut, extra virgin olive or shea butter are great moisturizers, but Livestrong.com also suggests you try mineral-free oil sheens.)

Protect hair from damage. Bundle braids into a hair net and then wrap your head with a satin scarf. This stops braids from rubbing or pulling against your pillow.

Click here to learn why braiding hair too tight is sooo bad for your delicate natural tresses.

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