Color Conscious

What you should know before you say dye!

December 5, 2016 By Jeanette L. Pinnace

Color is a wonderful way to spice up your look. But because black hair is so fragile, for many sistas, the potential for damage when coloring their tresses is real. Dye affects moisture, the very thing our hair needs most. This means that before you decide to reinvent yourself with an amazing new hue, you must ensure that your hair is in great shape and can handle the new shade.

One key test to see whether your hair is ready for color is to check its porosity. This quality refers to your hair's ability to absorb and hold moisture.

To determine your hair's porosity, remove strands from a comb or brush and drop them into a bowl of water. If after two to four minutes, your strands rise to the top, your hair's porosity is most likely low. But if they sink, it's a safe bet that your hair is highly porous.

This type of hair absorbs color quickly, so it's easy to overprocess tresses. Conversely, hair that's low in porosity isn't as receptive to the chemical compounds in dye and can be more difficult to color.

Other tactile tests include checking wet hair to see how much stretch your strands have. If your hair is more elastic than normal or the texture of your tresses is too "gummy," says one colorist at a salon in New York City, "it is not safe to dye."

Another measure of your tresses' receptiveness to color is what type of hair you have. Is your mane wavy, curly, coily, coarse, or a combination of these several different textures?

For example, coarse hair takes long to absorb color compared with finer strands. This affects the amount of time needed for your hair to hold on to dye.

If your mane is healthy enough for color, the next step is to determine your hair color goal. Do you want to temporarily or permanently change the color? If you simply want to change your hair color for a short time, you can use easy-to-apply rinses, mousses, spray-ons, hair mascaras and tinted shampoos and conditioners to deepen your hair color right at home.

Other short-term hair colors are available in semipermanent products, which don't contain ammonia and peroxide. Demi-permanent dyes also coat the hair gently with color and don't

include ammonia among their ingredients, but they are formulated with a small amount of peroxide. Both types of hair color gradually wash out with each shampoo. To make these temporary colors last longer, however, some colorists suggest you use controlled heat from a dryer to seal in the color.

According to color experts, another difference between these two types of temporary color is the size of their molecules. In semipermanent dyes, molecules aren't small enough to penetrate the cortex of the hair. But molecules in demi-permanent hair color products do make their way into the cortex. (This makes them very effective at covering gray hair.) Typically, semipermanent dyes last between six to 12 shampoos, while demi-permanent colors can last through nearly 24 shampoos.

As for permanent color, the peroxide in dye will first remove your hair's original color. This happens when the ammonia in permanent color opens the cuticle and allows the hair's cortex to absorb the new shade. To avoid damaging tresses, colorists assign a color level number corresponding to how light or dark your hair is and then calculate the degree of lightness or darkness and tone (how warm, cool or neutral a color is) of a shade that's needed to yield the desired hue.

These calculations can be fraught with peril. That's why experts strongly advise that if you want to permanently color your hair, the wise thing to do is consult a professional colorist.

Healthy Hues

Many substances can color hair naturally. Here are a few…

These ingredients for creating hair color can be found in your very own kitchen.

Coffee:

Use this popular breakfast beverage to cover gray or to help your hair go darker. Simply brew strong coffee, mix your cup of Joe with leave-in conditioner and let it cool. Then apply the mixture to your hair and wait an hour. Rinse it out with a mix of water and apple cider vinegar to help the color stay in longer.

Black tea:

This anytime drink is good for darkening hair color and also helps to cover gray hair. The tea should be highly concentrated. Place three to five tea bags in two cups of hot water and let them steep until the liquid is a muddy brown. Add sage (fresh or dried) to the tea to help open up the hair cuticles. Apply the cooled tea to your hair, and leave it on for at least one hour or overnight. Rinse out in the morning.

Herbs:

These botanicals can also be used to color tresses. The particular herb you use will depend on the color you want. Use calendula, marigold, rosehips and hibiscus to deepen a red color or add warm

highlights. The more you use this mixture the deeper the color becomes. Simmer the flowers in water, strain and cool. Pour into a spray bottle, apply and let your hair dry in the sun.

Bright juices:

Beet and carrot juice (who knew?) can also add red tints to your current color. Juice the veggies and use alone or mix. Apply about one cup of juice to your hair, work into the strands, wrap the hair and leave on for at least one hour. Then rinse out the juice and seal tresses with a spritz of apple cider vinegar.

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