Kitchen Prep

Forget store-bought stuff for your mane, just make your own hair treatments!

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These days, many women are raiding their cupboards and refrigerators for wholesome foods from Mother Nature to whip up nourishing recipes for their crowning glory. Here, we take a look at a few timeless hair care techniques you can try at home.

Fermented rice water is an ancient treatment that women in China, Japan and Southeast Asia have used for centuries to wash and condition their hair. Today, some women also use the milky mixture in the hope that they will achieve the same results as the Yao women of China, who credit this DIY hair rinse with the ability to grow their hair to world-record lengths. Guinness World Records lists the women as being among those with the longest hair in the world. Their shiny black tresses are, on average, about 6 feet long, and many sprout few, if any, gray hairs as they age.

In one study researchers conducted on the rice water, scientists found that the mixture contained inositol. This carbohydrate compound penetrates strands and is absorbed into the hair shaft where it repairs and strengthens damaged strands. Using an infrared microspectrometer to gauge electromagnetic radiation, scientists were able to gather detailed measurements of the number of inositol molecules distributed in the cross-section of individual hairs. “We demonstrated that inositol stays inside the hair, allowing its protective and beautifying effects to persist even after rinsing,” they concluded.

To make fermented rice water at home, take one cup of white or brown rice and remove any dirt or impurities. (Some believe organic rice is best.) Next, pour one cup of water into the rice and stir. Then, set the mixture aside for either 30 minutes or up to 24 hours to allow the grains to ferment, which turns the water milky and sour-smelling. Afterward, strain the mixture, and place the rice water in the refrigerator, to stop fermentation.

Individuals use the mixture as a shampoo, or massage it into the scalp before rinsing it out.

Another historical hair treatment that dates back almost 6,000 years to Egypt is made from the leaves of the aloe vera plant. The amino acids, proteins, minerals and vitamins, such as A, C and E, found in the plant can help heal both damaged hair and skin.

Users extract the juice from the thick leaves of the plant or slice them open to scoop out the transparent gel found inside. Some people apply either the juice or the gel directly to the scalp

and rub it in to increase circulation and stop the breakage that leads to hair loss. Those desiring ultra-moisturized strands, prefer mixing aloe vera with their favorite oils and leaving the treatment in the hair for five minutes before rinsing it out. (Conduct a patch test first, though, as some people are allergic to aloe, especially if they've never used it before.)

Other easy DIY hair preparations involve mixing plant oils, such as castor oil, avocado oil and neem oil (sourced from the fruits and seeds of an evergreen tree).

An easy homemade hair care concoction requires three tablespoons of castor oil, one tablespoon of jojoba oil and three drops of an essential oil, such as peppermint, tea tree or rosemary, to be mixed together in a bottle.

Once or twice each week, users apply a few drops onto the scalp, massage it in and leave it on their hair for 20 minutes. Afterward, they wash out the oil with shampoo.

Remember that a little oil goes a long way. An amount the size of a nickel should be sufficient to help stimulate blood flow, or moisturize or condition your tresses.

Best Practices

When making products at home, observe these rules.

Understand your hair and its needs. Assess the condition of your tresses and what kind of products you'll need to address any issues.

Do a patch test on your wrist for each ingredient you use. It's always best to check for allergic reactions before you use individual substances or products with a collage of ingredients on your head.

Have all materials you need on hand. Preparing hair treatments at home always goes more smoothly if you keep a list of all your ingredients before assembling these components.

Create a sanitary work environment. Use disposable gloves to handle the stuff you use. Wash your hands before, during and after working with any substances.

Add natural preservatives. This stops bacteria from invading and contaminating your mixtures. Drop vitamin E, rosemary, grapefruit seed, tea tree, eucalyptus or jojoba oils into your preparations to preserve them.

Sterilize containers. Thoroughly wash and boil glass jars or bottles—either amber or dark blue work best—before placing your concoctions inside.

Refrigerate. Cold temperatures help to extend the shelf life of hair preparations, especially if they're made with water.

Conduct regular quality control inspections. Check mixtures continuously for six to eight months to see whether the ingredients begin to separate or smell funny. Toss any preparations that fail these tests.

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