Conditioners vs. Sealers: What You May Not Know About Natural Oils

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New-jack naturalistas may be under the impression that all “natural” oils interact with tresses pretty much the same. But it turns out these healthy hair aids usually fall into two main categories: conditioners and sealers. Here, Curlynikki.com helps make sure you’re not rubbing the right oil the wrong way.

Conditioning oils. These include coconut, olive, avocado and castor oils, all high in saturated or monounsaturated fat. Heavy to medium oils like these moisturize tresses by being absorbed into the hair strand’s cuticle layer into its inner cortex. The benefit? This stops hair breakage. (Quick tip: Sistas with fine, natural hair should bypass these weightier oils.)

For best results, apply conditioning oils to dry hair an hour or more before shampooing. That’s right, these oils should be applied to your mane before you soak tresses with water. Why? Because otherwise your hair will absorb the water first, thus preventing the oils from being absorbed.

Sealing oils. The best ones include almond, grapeseed, flaxseed and sunflower oils, all high in polyunsaturated fat. These lighter oils stay on the surface of your strands, where they lock moisture in your tresses.

These less weighty oils are easy to apply; just evenly spray on wet hair. Fill a spray bottle or mister with your favorite sealing oil. Then, voila! You’re just a few pumps away from sealing your mane, which leaves a glossy glow on the hair’s surface.

But what’s key when you use either conditioning or sealing oils is that you keep them fresh. Store natural oils in cool places, such as a bedroom closet or kitchen pantry. And remember, most natural oils lose potency about a year after they’ve been opened. This is important to note because expired oils can leave your strands vulnerable to sun damage.

Click here to read about how to create a moisturizing regimen that’s right for your hair.

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