Quench Thirsty Locks

Easy ways to hydrate moisture-starved natural hair

March 6, 2017 By Gerrie E. Summers

Natural hair has its virtues. It's free of harmful chemical processes and can be easier to maintain. But giving your fragile natural hair the moisture it so desperately needs can be a challenge.

Depending on your hair's curl pattern and texture, it can be difficult to keep natural tresses hydrated. Although the hair follicles of African-American hair actually produce plenty of sebum, the oil is not evenly distributed. With tightly coiled or spiral-shaped hair follicles, it's often harder for natural oils from the scalp to travel down the hair shaft. Plus, the porosity of natural hair can affect how well it absorbs and retains the moisture that's so vital for the health and elasticity of your strands.

To keep natural tresses healthy, soft and supple, follow these simple rules:

Use water-based hair products

Begin with water-based moisturizers. These products will list water as the first ingredient.

Mist to add moisture

If hair is especially dry, spritz with a misting spray or plain water, making sure not to soak tresses. Be sure to moisturize the hair before applying oils, as this prevents moisture from penetrating the hair strands.

Oil to seal in the moisture

Make this the last step or the water will evaporate and really dry the hair. Don't seal your hair with a water-based moisturizer because the liquid in it will also evaporate and tresses will eventually appear dry; use an oil, such as jojoba.

Deep-condition

This step helps hair to retain moisture and assists moisturizers, oils and ointments in penetrating the strands. Use a butter-based product, such as shea butter or a moisturizing cream or soufflé. To avoid product buildup, apply conditioner to hair only, not the scalp. Cover with a plastic cap and sit under a hooded dryer or keep on overnight.

Use a hair steamer

This nifty appliance opens up the cuticles and allows products to be absorbed by the hair to hydrate thirsty strands. When paired with a conditioner, the steamer helps the product penetrate your tresses.

Pre-poo

It’s what you do before you shampoo. Coat the hair from root to tip with natural oil to add moisture prior to washing to stop breakage, help with detangling and make hair easier to manage during cleansing. Try coconut, avocado or olive oils, as they work well to penetrate the hair shaft.

Co-wash

Co-washing (using only conditioner, no shampoo) is another method to decrease the dryness that can be caused by washing the hair. Washing hair with a conditioner instead of shampoo is gentler on natural hair and won’t strip your mane of natural oils.

Opt for gentle products

Avoid sulfate shampoos, which dry hair, and products with alcohol, mineral oil and petroleum oil, which are actually sealants and also dry out the hair.

Nourish tresses from the inside out

Eat a well-balanced whole-foods diet containing healthy protein, omega-3s, vitamin A (beta-carotene), vitamin B complex, vitamins C and E and minerals, such as iron, selenium, copper, silicon sulfur and zinc. And be sure to keep your body hydrated by drinking plenty of fresh water.

Make It Moist

Drink water and spritz it on hair to soften and hydrate tresses.

Just like the body, hair needs water to maintain healthy strands. When it comes to naturally moisturizing hair, this precious liquid is second only to sebum. Hair needs water to help maintain elasticity and stretch without breaking off, which can easily happen when you manipulate breakage-prone natural hair with styling and washing.

But liquids alone don’t hydrate hair. In fact, without applying a moisturizer, water can cause dryness because upon its evaporation, the hair dries and moisture can drain from the outer layer (cortex).

Although water is ideal for misting protective styles, hair can be affected by the type of water in your area. Hard water, for example, has a high mineral content, which makes it difficult to work with. Hard water can make it tricky to rinse away shampoo and other products.

One solution is to invest in a water purification system. Another is to use purified or distilled water to rinse the hair after shampooing. In addition, chelating, or clarifying, shampoos can help remove

hard-water deposits.

As an alternative, try a weak apple cider vinegar hair rinse once a month. Add two tablespoons to 16 ounces of distilled or filtered water. Let sit for one to two minutes and rinse thoroughly.

Finally, drink up! Water flushes out toxins, helps hydrate the body and regulate the circulatory system, and delivers nutrients and moisture to the hair follicles.

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