

You're Conditioning Your Hair All Wrong



Image: IMaxTree

Talk to any stylist about conditioning your hair, and most will tell you, that although it's important, you should go light on product—only applying from mid shaft down to ends. Conditioned hair is stronger, yes, but heavy formulas will weigh down the hair and make styling almost impossible.

While these statements are fact, they focus on only one part of the equation—the hair. What

about the scalp?

“The scalp needs hydration regularly to be healthy and maintain an optimal environment for your hair follicles,” says Clear Scalp & Hair Dermatologist **Dr. Francesca Fusco**. “When not properly hydrated, the scalp can become dry, flakey, itchy and tight. Scalps that become extremely dry can become inflamed and this can lead to hair loss.”

Think about it. The scalp is skin. If you were bald, would you moisturize your scalp? (My boyfriend, who happens to be bald, moisturizes, layers on SPF and *even* exfoliates his scalp.) “I believe you should condition your scalp every time you shampoo,” says Dr. Fusco. “Just as you should moisturize every time you wash your skin. It is most important during cold winter months when the dry environment contributes to dry scalp.”

Just like you shouldn't shampoo everyday, you shouldn't condition everyday either. Natural oils, which are stripped every time you cleanse, condition the scalp just like they hydrate the face. Conditioner, like a facial moisturizer, is a helping hand when natural sebum isn't enough. However, if your hair has excessive oil, washing *and* conditioning only a few times a week will suffice. “It's important to get your scalp clean because that is where the oil comes from, without stripping all of the natural oils that your scalp and hair need,” says dermatologist and scalp expert **Rebecca Kazin, MD**. Less cleansing allows your skin to do its natural job of conditioning.

When you absolutely need to condition the scalp—when you color your hair. “Conditioning the scalp should be done when the hair is over processed and needs the moisture and reconstructive qualities can bring to fragile, lightened hair,” says **Brian Brady**, a stylist at Boston-based **G2O Spa + Salon**.

Fusco agrees, advising her patients to condition the night before a coloring appointment. “A well hydrated scalp will sting less and tolerate chemicals better.”

So how do we combat the effects these conditioning agents do have on the hair? Those with thick or coarse hair need not worry. “It can be applied all over because this type of hair is normally dry and thick so you would need a heavier, thick conditioner to add moisture where

it's lacking," says Brady. Those with fine hair are the ones who need to do a little testing.

To find a conditioner that won't weigh down hair, first look for any formula that doesn't include silicone. Yes, they add shine and reduce frizz, but this conditioning agent is extra heavy. Plus, it requires sulfates to be washed out, a chemical *all* hair types should steer clear of.

Then what should you look for? Dr. Fusco recommends oils such as omega 3,6, and 9 as well as stearic acid and sunflower oil. While you can slather these on individual for a DIY cocktail of sorts, Dr. Fusco swears by **Clear Scalp & Hair Active Damage**

Resist (\$5.99, clearhaircare.com) which contains all three. **Drybar Happy Hour**

Weightless Conditioner (\$23) has a similar light consistency, with sunflower oil and additional hydrating root oils.

"Instead of a creamy conditioner, consider switching to a spray-on formula or mist to avoid buildup," says Dr. Kazin. "In some cases, you can dilute the conditioner you are using with water, shake the bottle so it gets mixed up like a cocktail, and it will be thinner and more suitable for your hair type." **Natu Hair Care Volumizing Mist (\$15)** is infused with water, flower extract and light-weight peptides so the scalp and hair are hydrated and strengthened with little buildup.