

Beauty | February 1, 2017 | By Korin Miller

Gabrielle Union's New Hair-Care Line Has Officially Made Our Day

Get your wallet ready.



Gabrielle Union is getting attention from the beauty community after the actress announced that she's launching her own hair-care line, Flawless by Gabrielle Union, in April. The line, which is designed for women with kinky or curly hair, features 10 products that range in price from \$10 to \$29, including a moisturizing shampoo and conditioner, hair mask, and blow dry cream. The line, which is packed with ingredients like avocado, marula, and

argan oils, focuses on hydrating and pampering—which are important for anyone but especially crucial for people with kinky or curly natural hair.

“I want women with textured hair to have great hair days,” Union tells *WWD* in a new interview, adding that she’s struggled with her hair’s health in the past. “I went through a phase where I would leave my relaxer on so long, thinking the longer I leave this relaxer on, the straighter it’s going to be,” she said. “Cut to lesions, like open wounds in my scalp, trying to chase something that was unrealistic, and eventually probably in my mid- to late-20s I decided to give up my relaxer, and I went natural. By natural I mean underneath the weaves, extensions, clips, and the hair color was my natural hair—thriving.”

You may have used relaxers in the past, currently use them now, or be familiar with them because friends and family use them to straighten their hair. If not, relaxers are powerful lotions or creams some black women use to straighten their hair. And this isn’t the first time relaxers have been linked with scalp wounds: A class-action lawsuit was filed against L’Oreal in September on behalf of 100,000 women who claim that one of the company’s relaxers made them lose their hair. The suit alleges that the relaxer causes “disturbing and distressing injuries including hair loss and breakage as well as scalp irritation, blisters and burns,” the *AFP* reports. (A L’Oreal spokesperson responded by saying that relaxers are “technical products that can be used safely according to the instructions.”)

Joshua Zeichner, M.D., a New York City-based board-certified dermatologist, tells *SELF* that scalp irritation and hair damage can be big issues with relaxers. “Relaxers work by breaking apart the bonds that maintain hair curls,” he explains. “In doing so, however, the chemicals damage the hair shafts themselves, leading to dryness and breakage.” And, if a relaxer comes into contact with a person’s scalp, Zeichner says it can cause “significant” irritation to the skin that can result in an inflamed, itchy rash.

Gary Goldenberg, M.D., medical director of the Dermatology Faculty Practice at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, tells *SELF* that relaxers can have a lasting impact on a woman’s hair and scalp. “Chemical relaxers have been implicated in central centrifugal scarring alopecia,” which is a common cause of hair loss among black women, he says.

Relaxers have a caustic effect on the skin, meaning they can cause irritation or, in severe cases, burns and open sores, Zeichner says. If you use relaxers, he recommends visiting an experienced salon for the procedure, if your budget allows for it. If you opt for at-home relaxers, Zeichner says it’s important to make sure the chemical doesn’t come into contact with your scalp. “You can protect the scalp by using petroleum jelly in the part and along the frontal hairline as a safety measure,” he says. If you feel any burning or stinging, remove the relaxer from your hair immediately (or tell your stylist, so they can do so). And since kinky or curly natural hair are more prone to dryness and breakage, Goldenberg recommends moisturizing the scalp and using deep conditioning hair masks regularly, especially if you use relaxers.

If you develop irritation or itchiness from using a relaxer, Zeichner suggests applying an over-the-counter 1% hydrocortisone ointment to the affected area, and if you have any open sores, you can use over-the-counter antibiotic ointment, like Bacitracin. But if you have significant burns or wounds, it’s best to see a board-certified dermatologist for an evaluation, Goldenberg says, since there’s a chance you can develop an infection. They’ll recommend you press pause on using relaxers and other chemical hair treatments until your skin has time to heal, and they can offer advice to help nurse your hair and scalp back to health.