

Prevention

Dermatologists Finally Explain How Often Should Be Shampooing Your Hair

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April 24, 2020, 6:11 PM GMT+4



From Prevention

The debate has raged on for years about how often you *really* need to wash your hair. And while there are plenty of hot takes on the ideal shampoo schedule—ranging from once a day to once a week—dermatologists say there’s really no one-size-fits-all answer. “It depends on your hair and activity level,” says board-certified dermatologist [Gary Goldenberg, M.D.](#), assistant clinical professor of dermatology at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai in New York.

But one thing is clear: Cleansing your hair and scalp is important. Your hair follicles, which are surrounded by skin cells and oil glands, push your hair through the scalp, explains Dr. Goldenberg. Those oil glands produce a substance called sebum, which naturally conditions your locks to keep them healthy and soft. However, it’s also partially responsible for that greasy feeling between washes.

Enter shampoo. “The goal of shampooing is to help remove dirt, oil, and hair care products from the hair shafts themselves,” says Joshua Zeichner, M.D., director of cosmetic and clinical research in dermatology at Mount Sinai

Hospital in New York City. Because shampoo reaches your scalp, it also has a cleansing effect on the skin there, similar to the way that cleansers work on your body.

But is it harmful to wash your hair every day?

Not necessarily. But, again, this will depend on your individual needs. According to the American Academy of Dermatology (AAD), how often you wash your hair should be based on how much oil your scalp produces.

“If you have oily hair, it is perfectly safe and appropriate to wash your hair daily,” Dr. Zeichner says. “If you have dry hair or a sensitive scalp, however, you certainly can space out hair washing as needed.” Some people wash their hair daily, while others suds up every one to two weeks, he says. It’s all about personal preference.

Of course, it’s possible to shampoo too much. Washing your hair more than you need to can strip your hair of the sebum it needs to stay conditioned and soft, Dr. Goldenberg says, leading to brittleness or even breakage if you have very dry hair.

So, how often should you wash your hair?

There’s no right answer, even when you break things down by factors like hair type and oil production. Keep in mind that how often you exercise, whether you dye your hair, and even your age play a role in how often you should wash.

“If you’re super active, sweat can build up and help capture dirt in your hair, so you would need to shampoo more often,” Dr. Goldenberg says. On the flip-side, chemically-treated hair usually needs to be cleansed less to avoid fading color. And, as you get older, your scalp makes less oil, so you may not feel the need to suds up often.

In general, experts say this is a good washing guide to follow for most major types of hair:

- **Oily hair:** Wash daily or every other day. Dr. Goldenberg says he uses this as a “general rule” for patients.
- **Dry, coarse hair:** Wash once a week. “Those with dry and coarse hair usually do not need to shampoo as often as their hair doesn’t produce as much oil,” Dr. Goldenberg says. Some people prefer to simply rinse their hair with water and use just a conditioner every few days instead, a method known as “co-washing.”
- **Fine hair:** Wash daily or every other day. Fine hair is easy for sebum to cover, and it can look greasy faster than thick hair, Dr. Goldenberg says.

There’s still some trial and error involved here. “The look and feel of your hair will help,” Dr. Goldenberg says. If your strands feel dry and brittle, dial back your shampoo schedule by a day or two. If your hair is always oily, add a day or two back into your routine.

What should you look for in a shampoo?

The right shampoo makes all the difference in your hair and scalp health, Dr. Zeichner says. That’s why he recommends choosing a product that’s designed for your hair type.

This is more important than you’d think. “Some of the shampoos designed for dry hair may end up weighing down fine hair, making it feel limp,” Dr. Zeichner says. But clarifying shampoos (which work to remove build-up on your scalp and strands) can be overly stripping for people with dry or coarse hair, he says.

“Most shampoo have surfactants, a soapy substance that helps remove oil and dirt,” Dr. Goldenberg says. “Other products are then added to give shampoo its scent and feel. Shampoos for oily hair will have more of the soap, whereas those for dry hair are more gentle.”

Color your hair? Dr. Zeichner recommends looking for something that’s free of sulfates, which tends to be gentler.

If you’ve been following the “rules” of shampooing and you still feel like your hair isn’t looking its best, reach out to your dermatologist, whole should be able to offer up personalized recommendations—like the expert-approved picks below!