

Here's How Often You Should Actually Wash Your Hair, According to Dermatologists

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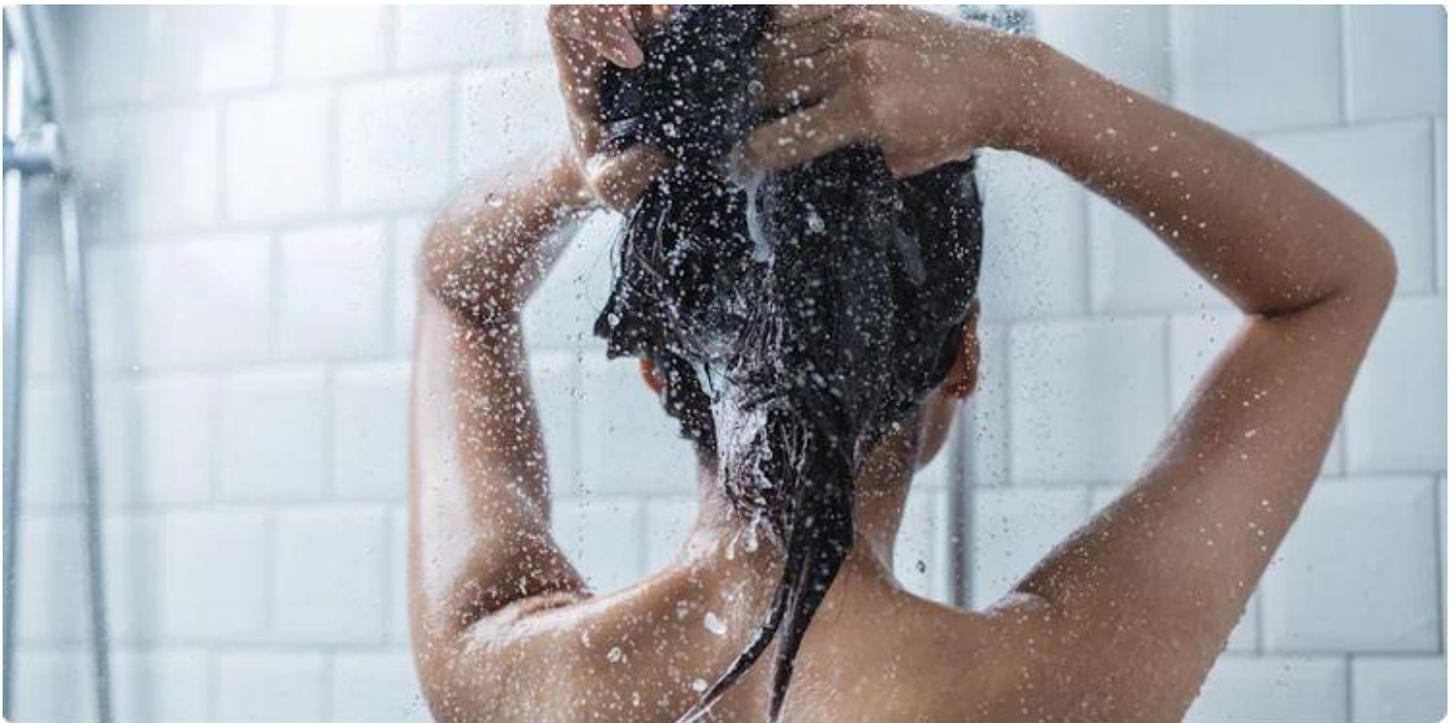


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The debate has raged on for years about how often you *really* need to wash your hair—and if it's bad to wash your hair every day. While there are plenty of hot takes on the ideal shampoo schedule—ranging from every day to once every few weeks depending on your hair type—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 for sure: 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 (a.k.a. oil), which naturally conditions your locks to keep them healthy and soft. However, it's also partially responsible for that greasy feeling between washes and contributes to build-up and dandruff. That's where the magic of shampoo (be it sulfate-free, dandruff-banishing, or made of all-natural ingredients) comes in.

Is it bad 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,” says

Joshua Zeichner, M.D., director of cosmetic and clinical research in dermatology at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York City. “If you have dry hair or a sensitive scalp, however, you certainly can space out hair washing as needed.” Some people wash their hair every day, 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 smooth, Dr. Goldenberg says, leading to brittleness or even breakage if your strands are super parched.

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, your hair texture, whether or not you have color-treated hair, and even your age play a role in how often you should lather, rinse, and repeat.

“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, dyed tresses are best cleansed less to avoid fading color. And, as you get older, your scalp makes less oil, creating a less frequent need to shampoo.

If you have curly hair—particularly a pattern that lands anywhere between the 3B and 4C types—you shouldn’t over-wash, as it can strip the hair of moisture, says Sabrina Rowe Holdsworth, celebrity hairstylist and founder of NTRL By Sabs.

In general, experts provide washing guidance based on hair type, outlined below:

- **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 a creamier, conditioner-like co-wash every few days. “Using a co-wash helps the hair retain its moisture as they are cream-based and sulfate-free,” explains Holdsworth. “Always use products that specifically say they are for co-washing as using any type of conditioner can expose you to unwanted build-up.”
- **Curly hair:** Those with 3 hair types “can wash more frequently than 4,” Holdsworth says. “I would say two times a week for 3 types and once a week for 4 types is plenty.” She adds that washing less frequently is also totally fine. “If your scalp remains clean,” she says, “both types could wash every two weeks.” But she doesn’t recommend going much longer than that without shampooing. “The scalp needs some kind of rinse (even waterless is fine) to remain balanced every 14 days,” she adds. Co-washing is also a staple for curly hair.
- **Fine hair:** Wash daily or every other day. Thin hair is easy for sebum to cover, and it can look greasy faster than thick hair, Dr. Goldenberg says.

Even with our handy guide, finding your shampoo sweet spot will still take some trial and error. “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 it’s always oily, add a day or two back into your routine.

How shampoo works

“The goal of shampooing is to help remove dirt, oil, and hair care products from the hair shafts themselves,” says Dr. Zeichner, 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 body washes work.

How to find the best shampoo for you

The right shampoo makes all the difference in your hair and scalp health, Dr. Zeichner says. It’s also a driving factor in how often you wash. That’s why it’s super important to use one that suits your hair type.

“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 [shampoos] have surfactants, a soapy substance that helps remove oil and dirt,” Dr. Goldenberg explains. “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.”

If you’re always at the salon, Dr. Zeichner recommends looking for something that’s free of sulfates, which tends to be easier on your stylist’s masterpiece.

After making adjustments to your wash schedule, if you’re still struggling to get it right, there’s no harm in reaching out to your dermatologist for recommendations (or throwing a dry shampoo in the mix). If your current bottle happens to be low and you’re just looking to try something new, check out our expert-approved picks below.