

9 Home Remedies for An Itchy Scalp + Common Causes

By Hannah Frye



Having an itchy scalp is annoying, to say the least. Not only is this area difficult to treat, but there are so many compounding triggers that it can take a full-fledged investigation to find out what's causing the irritation.

Most of the time, you can attribute an itchy scalp to [dandruff](#), product buildup, or dryness, to name a few culprits. Sure, you can buy expensive creams and serums to ease the itch, but there are plenty of DIY remedies available, too. To come, a few quick and easy at-home treatments to test out the next time your scalp needs the help.

1. Aloe vera.

First up, we have the well-known skin soother: aloe vera—but preferably from the leaf, not a bottle, if you can find it. “Fresh aloe vera is best, as the medicinal properties deteriorate over time,” board-certified dermatologist [Cynthia Bailey, M.D., previously told mbg](#). “Many commercial aloe vera gels and juices contain other ingredients such as preservatives.” You can find 100% pure aloe vera gel on the market; just make sure it doesn't contain any unnecessary fragrances or dyes.

Aloe vera also has anti-inflammatory properties, “so it may benefit those with [scalp inflammation](#) and irritation,” board-certified dermatologist [Gary Goldenberg, M.D., once shared with mbg](#).

To sum it all up: Fresh aloe on the scalp can be a particularly soothing treatment for anyone experiencing dryness, flakes, or irritation. Plus, those with a highly sensitive scalp can use aloe vera without worry of irritation from fragrance or astringents. How to use it:

The easiest way to use aloe vera is to whip up a simple [scalp mask](#). Here's the how-to:

1. **Prep your aloe:** You can either buy a fresh aloe vera leaf or 100% pure aloe vera gel (make sure to look out for added dyes or fragrances). If you opt for the fresh leaf, you'll need to scrape out the aloe gel and blend it until it reaches a more liquid consistency. If you bought the pure aloe gel, then you're all set.
2. **Apply:** Gently apply the aloe mask to a clean scalp before you shower. “Clean” is the operative word here; make sure you don't have tons of product buildup from dry shampoo or hair spray on your scalp.
3. **Massage:** Really work the aloe vera into the scalp via a gentle scalp massage. Remember, use your fingertips, not your nails.
4. **Let it set:** Let the mask sit for 20 minutes before rinsing it out, then follow your normal hair-wash routine.

2. Coconut oil.

Next, we have [coconut oil](#). This ingredient has been loved for centuries for its hydrating properties, now used in countless face, body, hair, and scalp products. It's a heavy occlusive moisturizer, which means it locks in moisture.

“Coconut oil has also been traditionally used as a natural antimicrobial product. This is thanks to key ingredients, such as lauric acid,” says biomedical doctor, hair expert, and founder of hair care brand [Alodia, Isfahan Chambers-Harris, Ph.D.](#) “The oil may therefore help combat *malassezia*, the fungus commonly known to contribute to dandruff.”

Not to mention, it's great for your strands as well. Since coconut oil has a [low molecular weight1](#), it can penetrate easily into the hair shaft and absorb better than other common oils.

This ingredient is a great choice for those with extra dry scalps or dehydrated strands in need of a simultaneous revamp. It can be a bit heavy, though, so those with fine hair or prone to oily scalps may want to opt for a lighter oil, like jojoba.

How to use it:

This oil is best used on the scalp as a massaging aid. Here's the how-to:

1. **Prep your oil:** You'll want your coconut oil to be in a liquid state, so pop it in the microwave or toss a few spoonfuls in a pot on the stove and let it melt. You don't want to use it when it's super hot, but getting it to a liquid consistency is a must.
2. **Apply to fingers:** Pour your melted oil into a bowl and let it cool. Once it's at room temperature, dip your fingers in the bowl and start massaging your scalp.
3. **Massage:** Continue gently massaging the oil into your scalp (with your fingertips, not your nails) for a few minutes, or until your whole head has been massaged.
4. **Apply to strands:** This step is optional. If you want to hydrate your strands as well, apply the coconut oil to the shafts and ends of your hair. You don't need to fully coat each strand, but try to spread the oil somewhat evenly.
5. **Let it sit:** If you have the time, let the coconut oil sit on your scalp and strands for 15 to 20 minutes. Then rinse it out and wash your hair like normal.

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3. Apple cider vinegar.

While apple cider vinegar is best known for its [gut health benefits](#), it's a wonderful ingredient to add to your hair care routine, too. "Like aloe vera, ACV can lower pH, helping to bring the hair and scalp health back into balance," Chambers-Harris notes.

In addition, research suggests [ACV may help with dandruff](#) caused by yeast on the scalp. "ACV acidity makes a less favorable environment for the yeast and therefore may halt its growth, leading to less flaking," board-certified dermatologist [Morgan Rabach, M.D.](#), and co-founder of LM Medical NYC, once [said about the ingredient](#).

ACV can also provide gentle exfoliation, as it naturally contains [lactic acid](#). This AHA is a particularly beneficial acid for skin health, as it can act as humectant as well. This means it can pull in water and hydration while exfoliating the epidermis.

So to sum it all up, ACV can balance your scalp's pH, ease dandruff, and provide gentle exfoliation—addressing many of the potential triggers of an itchy scalp in a single go.

However, you should always dilute the vinegar first before applying (catch our recipe below); you never want to put the acidic substance directly on your scalp. Those with a hypersensitive scalp may also want to patch-test this ingredient first, as it may be slightly irritating.

How to use it:

[This DIY ACV hair rinse](#) is one of the quickest and easiest itchy scalp remedies you can find. Here's the how-to.

- **Make your mix:** Add ½ tablespoon of ACV and 1 cup of cold water to a squeezeable bottle or spray bottle (try to repurpose empty shampoo or conditioner bottles to save plastic). Then, shake it up to mix.

- Time your use: Each hair type can benefit from this rinse in a different way. Below, a few notes to keep in mind:
- For oily hair: Use the rinse post-shampoo.
- For frequent washers: Swap your shampoo and conditioner for this rinse once or twice a week.
- For dry hair: Wash your hair once or twice a week, and use this rinse any other time you need to get your strands wet.
- For super dry or textured hair: Use shampoo once a week and this rinse any other times you want to gently cleanse your hair.

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5. Tea tree oil.

Next up, a remedy for oily *and* itchy scalps: “Tea tree oil has natural anti-fungal properties that can help with itchy scalp,” Chambers-Harris explains. Plus, it may help ease dandruff as well.

One study found that using a shampoo that contained tea tree oil was an effective way to [improve mild to moderate dandruff²](#). The group that used the oil for four weeks showed a 41% improvement in symptoms (less itchiness, scaliness, etc.) compared to the placebo group, which had an 11% improvement.

However, this oil is incredibly potent, which is why you should always mix it with carrier oil or another hair product. If you don’t, you risk heightened irritation on the scalp, which could increase the itch you’re already experiencing.

How to use it:

To ensure you don’t irritate your scalp, simply add a few drops of tea tree oil to your shampoo puddle in your hand when your scalp is craving a detox—yes, it really is that easy. Or you can opt for one of these pre-mixed [tea tree shampoos](#).

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6. Jojoba oil

We’ve mentioned jojoba oil a few times as a carrier oil, but it serves as a great scalp treatment à la carte as well. “Jojoba oil is an oil-like wax that is similar to the oil your scalp produces called sebum,” Chambers-Harris explains.

“Because of this, it’s a great moisturizer for the scalp and can lower inflammation, decreasing the itchiness,” she adds. Not to mention, it’s noncomedogenic (read: won’t clog your pores), so it’s safe to use for anyone prone to [scalp or hairline breakouts](#).

Plus, jojoba oil can also [improve strands’ resistance to breakage³](#)—and with less breakage comes fuller, longer hair.

How to use it:

Due to its ability to hydrate the skin and strengthen the hair, your best bet for using jojoba oil is an overnight scalp *and* hair treatment. Here’s the how-to:

1. Pick your product: Look for pure, organic jojoba oil. You’ll want to find a product with a simple ingredient list that’s free of essential oils and other fillers if possible.
2. Apply to scalp: Then apply the jojoba oil to your scalp just as you would a regular scalp oil. Massage this in with your fingertips.

3. Apply to strands: You might as well apply some jojoba oil to your strands as well, while you're in the process of easing an itchy scalp. Run the oil through your strands. If you want, you can run a brush through your hair to distribute the oil.
4. Let it set: You can opt for the full overnight treatment or leave the oil in for an hour or so. You can wrap your hair in a loose bun or braid, or plop it in a hair towel for a mess-free experience.

6. Avocado oil.

Avocado oil deserves an honorable mention: It retains [all the vitamins and nutrients](#) from fresh avocado (other than vitamins B and C, which are water-soluble), and it rapidly absorbs into the skin and hair without weighing down the strands. These properties make it superb for a stimulating scalp massage.

Or, you can always use a full avocado: This is a better idea for those looking to do a full scalp *and* hair mask in one go. We have loads of [avocado hair masks recipes here](#), if you're curious.

How to use it:

For a scalp-only treatment, follow the same protocol as many of the other oil-based remedies. Apply the avocado oil to your scalp or your fingers and massage it in pre-wash. You can let it sit for 15 to 20 minutes or rinse it out immediately—whatever you have time for.

7. Rosewater toner

If you're short on time or you want an on-the-go option, let it be [rosewater](#). "Rosewater has anti-inflammatory properties, which can help to lower the inflammation of the scalp," Chambers-Harris notes.

Not to mention, you can use rosewater on your skin as well, making this [DIY multipurpose](#).

How to use it:

You can buy pure rosewater at the store or make your own. Here's how:

1. Gather your ingredients: First, you have to find your roses. You can either use ½ cup fresh rose petals (which translates roughly to the petals of one large rose) or ¼ cup dried rose petals. Then, you'll need 1½ cups of distilled water. If you can't get your hands on distilled, then filtered water should be fine.
2. Simmer away: Put your petals and water into a small pan and let the mixture simmer for about 15 minutes. You'll know they're ready when all of the pigment has been drained from the petals. After that, strain your mist into a clean spray bottle of your choosing.
3. Place it in the fridge: You'll want to keep your rosewater in the fridge to keep it fresh. Because this blend is all-natural (i.e.: sans preservatives), you'll want to keep it for only a week at a time. After that, toss the water, wash your bottle, and make another fresh batch.

We have an [in-depth rosewater DIY story here](#) if you want to learn more.

8. Yogurt.

Yogurt is a staple base product in the world of DIY skin care, and the same goes for scalp treatments. Yogurt naturally contains a fair share of [lactic acid](#), a chemical exfoliant that gently sloughs dead skin cells.

And while Greek yogurt tends to have the best consistency for scalp masks, you can also choose coconut or soy yogurt for a [vegan option](#)—just try to find one that includes added probiotics, so your [skin microbiome](#) can still reap the benefits.

How to use it:

You can certainly use yogurt alone as a pre-wash scalp treatment, or you can mix it with some of the nourishing ingredients mentioned above like avocado oil, aloe vera, or ACV. Simply apply your custom blend to your scalp and let it set for 10 to 15 minutes. Then rinse it out and follow up with your normal hair care routine.

9. Argan oil

Last but certainly not least, we have argan oil. This one has a similar function as jojoba oil in terms of scalp and hair benefits but will induce more shine than many other oils.

Again, anyone with oily roots may want to skip this treatment and opt for something lighter, like an aloe vera mask, rosewater toner, etc.

How to use it.

You'll want to give the argan oil ample time to soak into your scalp and strands, so it's best to use it as an overnight treatment.

1. Find pure argan oil: As mentioned earlier, make sure your oil is free of essential oils or other potentially irritating ingredients.
2. Apply: Apply your argan oil from the scalp to the ends on dry hair and brush it through if you choose to.
3. Wrap it up: You probably don't want argan oil getting on your pillows and clothing, so wrap up your hair in a microfiber towel or old T-shirt before you fall asleep. In the morning, rinse it out and wash per usual.

Itchy scalp causes.

When you're looking for the best itchy scalp remedy for your situation, it's probably a good idea to determine the root cause. Take a close look at your scalp in the mirror and check for any of the following signs:

- Dandruff: If you see larger, yellow-ish flakes, you're probably dealing with [dandruff](#). If that's the case, opt for the tea tree method above or [try one of these derm-approved remedies to ease the flakes](#).
- Dry skin: Simple dryness is a common cause of an itchy scalp as well. You might see flakes in your roots if your scalp skin is thirsty, but they'll be smaller and their color will be closer to that of skin rather than yellow. If you have a dry scalp, opt for one of the hydrating oil treatments or the aloe vera mask. You can also see [here](#) for all of our scalp moisturizing tips.
- Buildup: If you tend to wash your hair once or twice a week *or* you use loads of dry shampoo or hairspray, then you're probably experiencing [buildup](#). When your products sit on the roots for too long, it can cause inflammation that leads to itch. Try the ACV rinse above after shampooing or opt for a [clarifying shampoo](#) or [scalp detox](#) to clean out the excess product and relieve your scalp ASAP.
- Allergic reaction: If you just started using a new shampoo, conditioner, or leave-in product, you could be having an allergic reaction to it. Experiment with skipping that product for a week or so and test it out again to see if the itching returns.

What home remedies you shouldn't use.

As a quick reminder, not every home remedy is safe for the scalp. Below, a few remedies to consider skipping.

- Lemon juice: Don't apply lemon juice to your scalp, or anywhere on your body for that matter. The juice on its own is far too irritating and may cause stinging and even more inflammation.
- Undiluted ACV: Apple cider vinegar is a great ingredient for the scalp, but it needs to be diluted before you use it.

- Baking soda: Baking soda can be abrasive to the skin and mess with your scalp's pH level—skip this DIY ingredient if you can.
- Straight essential oils: Like ACV, essential oils are too potent to be used on their own. If you're going to use tea tree, be sure to dilute it in shampoo or a carrier oil.