



HOW-TO GUIDE • HAIR

Keep your pattern bright through heat and colour

This guide is for anyone who uses heat or colour and wants to keep pattern and shine. After reading, you will be able to set temperature, place the nozzle, and plan porosity care across the month.

- **Start low**
Damage starts above 130 C, so test the lowest effective heat first.
- **Dry smart**
Air dry to half dry, then shape with nozzle aimed roots to ends.
- **Know porosity**
Float, slip and spray tests point care toward light layers or richer seals.

By Vanessa Delgado • Updated Aug 29, 2026 • 12 min read

CONTENTS

01	Choose and apply heat protection	05	Test porosity at home
02	Set temperature by hair type	06	Match care, trims and colour spacing to porosity
03	Blow dry with nozzle control	07	The checklist
04	Flat iron in fewer passes	08	Sources and further reading

Dry ends, faded shine and a curl pattern that will not spring back usually come from heat set too high or colour layered too fast. Once temperature, nozzle placement and porosity are matched to hair type, styling takes fewer passes and moisture stays where it belongs.

01

Choose and apply heat protection

Heat protectants slow harm, they do not block it. Straighteners and curling irons heat hair to between 95 and 170 C, and damage to pigments, keratin and cuticle starts above 130 C. Reports place the ceiling at about 50 percent heat protection at most, so expectation matters as much as product. A protectant buys margin, technique does the rest.

Films form the first group. Silicones including dimethicone, cyclomethicone and silicone quaterniums are described as low conductivity films that slow heat transfer and reduce moisture loss. Think of them as a thin shield that gives the cuticle more time under the iron. Some people dislike silicones for buildup, especially on fine hair, so amount and cleansing need attention.

Proteins and polymers form the second group. A 1998 study in the Journal of Cosmetic Science found PVP/DMAPA acrylates copolymer, quaternium 70 and hydrolyzed wheat protein gave 10 to 20 percent less curling iron damage at 1 percent solutions. The numbers are modest and old, yet they explain why many sprays pair a film with a little protein. Protein is described as supportive for high porosity or chemically treated hair, while too much can leave low porosity hair stiff or prone to snapping.

Oils sit nearby, useful for slip and sealing but easy to overdo. One to two pumps through mid lengths and ends is enough for most heads. More oil on fine hair flattens volume and invites buildup without adding protection.

Apply to damp hair before heat, then comb through so every section carries the same thin coat. Sam Villa puts it bluntly: "Product is not an option, it's a necessity." Let hair dry fully before any iron touches it. Wet hair heated with irons can form steam that blasts through hair structure as moisture leaves, which is why sizzling, steaming or a hot wet smell means stop.

A damp hair method that works across textures

1. Towel dry gently, then detangle in sections from ends upward.
 2. Mist or smooth protectant from mid lengths to ends, then comb through.
 3. Air dry or rough dry before detailed work, keeping the iron for dry hair only.
 4. Recheck ends before each pass and add a small amount only where hair feels bare.
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02

Set temperature by hair type

Temperature should follow the finest, most fragile part of the head, not the most resistant. Brand charts and chemist advice do not fully agree, so treat the lower number as home base and move up only when hair truly does not respond. Cosmetic chemist sources place the sweet spot for most hair types between 300 and 375F and warn that 375F and up risks breaking disulfide bonds. Alanna Tran, cosmetic chemist, explains: "Once you get to 375 °F and up, you risk breaking disulfide bonds, which are responsible for the hair's core strength and shape."

Brand temperature charts list higher ceilings. Fine and fragile hair is listed at 250F to 300F, starting at the lowest effective temperature with thermal protectant. Normal hair is listed at 330F to 350F as a baseline that responds well without higher temperatures. Naturally wavy hair is listed at 350F to 370F for daily use. Coarse or textured hair is listed at 370F to 410F, starting at 370F and working up only as needed. Very thick and stubborn hair is listed at 410F to 450F on tools that heat to 450F. Synthetic hair is listed as extremely fragile and should not exceed 160F, starting at the lowest setting such as 140F.

Chemist and trichologist ranges sit lower. For fine or fragile hair the advised range is 200F to 300F with heat protectant. For medium or wavy hair the advised range is 300F to 325F, staying below 325F for most textures in this group. For coarse or very curly hair the advised range is 325F to 400F, starting at 350F and not breaking 400F. Brand temperature charts list up to 450F for very thick hair but at the chair you rarely need to go above 375 to 400F. Kerry E. Yates, trichologist and founder of Colour Collective, says of the top setting: "Honestly, that setting shouldn't even exist on consumer tools"

A simple way to use both views is to start low, test one section, then pause. If the style holds after cooling, stay there. If it drops, raise by 10 to 15 degrees and test again. Fine, bleached or thinning areas stay at the low end even when the rest of the head runs hotter. Colour treated hair also favours lower heat because pigment and keratin already carry stress above 130 C.

FROM THE EDITORS

Heat numbers look exact on a dial and rough in real life. Attachments, section thickness and pass speed all change exposure, so judge by a cooled test section rather than chasing a fixed number.

03

Blow dry with nozzle control

A calm blow dry starts before the dryer is plugged in. Blow dry prep includes towel drying and air drying to 50 to 60 percent, then rough drying to about 80 percent before round brush work. That pause cuts dryer time, keeps the cuticle smoother and helps texture stay defined. Sectioning keeps the work even, usually four to six sections clipped up, working from nape to crown so each piece dries once.

Nozzle direction shapes shine. For shine, the dryer nozzle should point in the same direction as the hair from roots to tips with constant round brush tension. Airflow for round brush shaping should generally travel from the root side toward the ends along the current path of the hair. Nozzle control is described through target, vector, standoff, footprint and traverse coordinated with the active brush zone. In plain terms, aim where hair should lie, keep a small gap between nozzle and brush, cover a neat ribbon of hair and move steadily without parking heat in one spot.

Tool choice changes finish more than marketing suggests. Use a concentrator nozzle for straight or wavy hair and a deep bowl diffuser for curls. The concentrator narrows air for tension and smoothness, while the diffuser spreads air so curls keep their groupings. Most hair types can be blow dried with around 1,800 watts, very thick hair may need 2,000 watts or more, and baby fine or curly hair can start at 1,400 watts. Lower wattage with a longer air dry often suits fragile hair better than high heat used fast.

Keep distance and motion steady. Hold the nozzle a few inches from hair, never pressed to the strand, and keep both dryer and brush moving. Lukewarm to medium heat shapes most hair, with high heat saved for very thick resistant sections. Finish each section with a cool shot to set the shape, then release and let it cool untouched. If hair feels rough or looks dull after drying, the cause is often drying past dry or brushing without tension rather than a missing product.

04

Flat iron in fewer passes

Fewer slow passes beat many fast ones. Heat harm builds with each contact, so the aim is one clean pass that holds after cooling. Start with hair fully dry and already smoothed by the blow dry in small sections. Small sections let heat reach evenly, which means the dial can stay lower.

Work section by section at a steady pace. Place the iron near the root without touching scalp, close gently and glide to the ends without stopping. Tugging slows the pass and raises exposure, while rushing leaves waves that invite a second pass. If a section springs back, let it cool and judge again before repeating. Often the style sets as it cools and no repeat is needed.

Smell and sound give fast feedback. If you smell burning, see smoke beyond a faint wisp of product, or hear sizzling, open the iron and stop. Check whether hair was fully dry, whether product built up on the plates, and whether temperature was too high for that section. Clean plates, dry hair and a lower setting solve most scorching. Ends need less heat than roots, so some people iron roots first and glide lighter toward tips.

High numbers are rarely required at home. The evidence supports starting low and increasing only as needed, and chemist guidance warns against routine use at 375F and above. Thick hair may style near 370F, yet the same head may need far less around the hairline. Daily ironing on the same sections raises risk even at moderate heat, so cut back on heat and skip daily heat styling since no set number of safe passes or minutes exists. When texture matters, save full straightening for occasion days and refresh with the blow dryer or a wrapped night method between washes.

05

Test porosity at home

Porosity is defined as the ability to absorb and retain moisture, set by whether cuticle scales lie flat or are raised. Flat scales shed water and hold shine, raised scales drink fast and lose moisture fast. A 2025 Ethique guide states heat styling, chemical processing and harsh weather can raise the cuticle and shift porosity over time. That shift explains why hair that once air dried slowly may start drying fast after bleach or frequent hot tools.

Three home tests give clues, not verdicts. Home porosity tests include the water float test, the slip and slide test from end to root, and the spray bottle bead versus absorb test. Float, slip and spray tests are described as useful starting points but not clinically validated and can be skewed by buildup or residue. Start with clean, product free hair for the clearest read.

For the float test, drop a clean shed strand in a glass of room temperature water and watch for a few minutes. Floating suggests slow uptake, sinking suggests fast uptake. For the slip test, pinch a strand and slide fingers from end toward root. A smooth slide leans low, a rough or

bumpy feel leans high. For the spray test, mist a dry section and watch. Beading that sits on the surface leans low, instant absorption leans high.

Read the pattern across tests rather than trusting one. Low porosity hair is linked to slow absorption, long air dry time and buildup, and is helped by lightweight products and occasional clarifying. High porosity hair is linked to fast absorption, fast drying, breakage and split ends, and is helped by richer creams, oils and regular deep conditioning plus regular trims. When tests disagree, treat hair as mixed porosity and care for each zone as it behaves, lighter at the roots, richer at bleached ends.

FROM THE EDITORS

Buildup can mimic low porosity and damage can mimic high porosity. If results look odd, clarify once, retest on clean dry hair, and watch how hair dries over a week before changing the whole routine.

06

Match care, trims and colour spacing to porosity

Care lands better when porosity sets the texture of products, not just the amount. Low porosity hair favours lightweight leave ins, thin lotions and small amounts of oil, since heavy layers sit on the surface and dull shine. Warm water and thorough rinsing help spread product, while occasional clarifying lifts film when hair feels coated. High porosity hair favours richer creams, oils and regular deep conditioning, with protein used in balance when hair is chemically treated or snaps easily. Seal damp ends with cream then a small amount of oil to slow moisture loss between washes.

Water temperature and trims protect both groups. Lukewarm water for washing and rinsing keeps cleansing comfortable without roughing the cuticle. Regular trims limit split ends, which matters more for high porosity hair that is linked to breakage, and keeps shape for low porosity hair that shows uneven ends clearly. Trim timing depends on growth, style and damage rather than a fixed rule, so judge by ends that tangle, look transparent or refuse to hold shape. Anyone with hair loss, scalp pain, burns or eczema flares should see a dermatologist, and a child with skin flares should see a pediatrician.

Colour spacing needs honesty about limits. There is no set interval for single process, highlight or bleach appointments, and no set monthly heat budget in passes or minutes. What the evidence does support is spacing that protects texture: fewer chemical services at once, lower heat between appointments, and protein plus moisture matched to porosity after lightening. Bring history to the consultation, including past bleach, relaxers, henna and at home colour, plus current heat use and wash rhythm. Ask how the plan accounts for porosity, what maintenance the shade needs, and what signs would call for a pause.

A monthly rhythm can still be built from what is known. Choose one or two heat days per week at most rather than daily styling, keep the iron at or below the low effective temperature for the hair type, and let texture rest between heat days with air dried styles. Pair each heat day with protectant on dry clean hair, nozzle aimed roots to ends, and a cool set. At the basin pair each colour service with a trim check, a deep conditioning plan and a lower heat setting until ends feel stable. The calendar below turns those links into habit.

07

The checklist

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- ☐ Apply heat protectant to damp hair and comb through evenly
 - ☐ Confirm hair is fully dry before any flat iron pass
 - ☐ Start at the lowest effective temperature for the finest section
 - ☐ Air dry to 50 to 60 percent before detailed blow drying
 - ☐ Point the nozzle roots to ends with steady brush tension
 - ☐ Use a concentrator for smooth styles and a diffuser for curls
 - ☐ Take small sections and aim for one slow iron pass
 - ☐ Stop and lower heat if you smell burning or hear sizzling
 - ☐ Test porosity on clean hair with float, slip and spray
 - ☐ Match product weight to porosity and clarify when coated
 - ☐ Wash and rinse with lukewarm water and seal ends lightly
 - ☐ Plan heat days weekly and rest texture between them
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Sources and further reading

- How do heat protectant hair products work? Lab Muffin Beauty Science · labmuffin.com
- How Hot Should Your Flat Iron Be? It Depends on Your Hair Type and Goals. · nytimes.com
- The Ultimate Guide To Blow Dry Hair Without Damage · samvilla.com
- Professional Blow-Dryer Nozzle Positioning, Distance, and Airflow Direction with Round Brushes · bassbrushes.com
- How to Build a Hair Care Routine Based on Your Porosity — Clementine's Salon and Skin Care · clementinesdenver.com
- What Is Hair Porosity, and How Do You Test It? · olaplex.com
- What Is Hair Porosity? Understanding Your Hair's Ability to Retain Moisture · ethique.com

For information only, not medical advice. Hair loss, a scalp that will not settle, eczema flares and anything on a baby's skin belong with a dermatologist or a pediatrician.



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