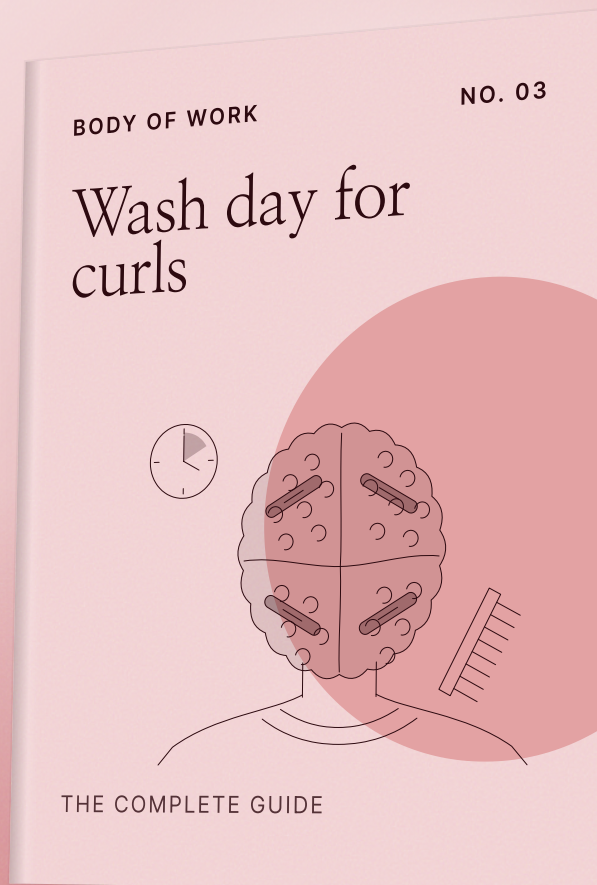




HOW-TO GUIDE • HAIR

Plan a two hour wash day for curls that holds all week

This guide is for anyone with waves, curls or coils who wants less breakage and dryness. After reading, you will be able to set up, wash, condition, style and protect hair in about two hours.

- **Start damp**
Detangle on wet hair in sections, never dry.
- **Cleanse kindly**
Wash in sections with a moisturizing shampoo.
- **Protect nightly**
Pineapple, loose twists and satin keep curls intact.

By Vanessa Delgado · Updated Jul 27, 2026 · 10 min read

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Sebum cannot slide easily down a tight curl, so the ends stay drier while the scalp stays normal. Breakage and single strand knots follow when hair is brushed dry, washed in one mass or left loose at night. Sectioning, damp detangling and layered moisture change that pattern and make wash day repeatable.

01

Plan your wash day by pattern and week

“Naturally curly or coily hair can feel overwhelming to care for,” says Temitayo Ogunleye, MD, FAAD, board-certified dermatologist. Her second point steadies the plan. “Thick, curly hair is more prone to breakage and dryness. However, with the right routine and hair care products, you can keep your curls healthy and looking good.”

Start by looking at pattern and scalp together. Waves may fall flat if products are heavy, while tight coils may drink up cream and still feel dry at the ends. A UK dermatology leaflet describes Afro-textured hair as tightly curled and spring-like, which elongates when stretched, and that shape helps explain why moisture struggles to travel the length. Length and thickness matter as much as curl shape. Long or thick hair tangles more easily, and dermatologists advise washing that hair in sections to reduce damage.

Gather tools before water touches hair. You will need a wide tooth comb or a brush designed for curly or coily hair, hair clips or bands for four to eight sections, a moisturizing shampoo formulated for curly hair, a rinse out conditioner or deep conditioner, a leave in conditioner, and a satin or silk cap, bonnet, scarf or pillowcase for night. If gels, oils, creams or pomades are part of styling, keep a clarifying shampoo nearby for the first cleanse. Pumps and amounts depend on density, so think in sections rather than in whole head amounts.

Timing works best when it fits a real week. Guidance on interval differs slightly, with a minimum of every 2 to 3 weeks in one place and every 1 to 3 weeks in UK guidance for wash day care. Use scalp comfort as the guide between those ranges. Itching, flaking, buildup or a sour smell means wash sooner. A child who swims, sweats heavily or wears a helmet for sport may also need a shorter interval. Between washes, a shower cap keeps hair dry in the shower, and a light refresh can stretch style without a full reset.

A two hour block suits many heads, although evidence does not set exact minutes for each step. Try splitting time into planning and sectioning, detangling, cleansing, deep conditioning, leave in layering, and styling. Leave the deep conditioner to work while the shower or sink area is tidied. Judge a new shampoo, conditioner or scalp serum over several weeks, not after one wash. "Trial and error are often needed to find the best routine for curly hair, so do not get discouraged if a certain product does not work for your hair type," says Dr Ogunleye.

Set your sections

Part damp or dry hair into four to eight twists or clipped bundles before stepping under water. More sections mean less tangling for long, thick or very coily hair. Keep clips loose enough to avoid dents and headaches. Each section will be washed, conditioned and styled on its own, then re-clipped while the next one is handled.

02

Detangle before you cleanse, on damp hair

Dermatologists advise detangling on thoroughly wet hair with leave in conditioner, using fingers or a wide toothed comb or brush designed for curly or coily hair. Dry brushing is best avoided because it can snap strands and raise frizz. The UK leaflet gives the same tool advice in plain terms, recommending a soft brush with widely spaced bristles and coated tips or a comb with widely spaced teeth.

Work with patience rather than force. Mist one section with lukewarm water until it is fully damp, smooth a little leave in or rinse out conditioner through it, then separate with fingers first. Fingers find shed hair and loose knots that a comb would catch and pull. Follow with the wide tooth comb, starting at the ends and moving up toward the roots in short strokes. Hold the base of the section so tension stays on your hand, not on the scalp.

If hair is very dry or hard to detangle before shampooing, dermatologists advise applying conditioner before washing. This pre cleanse softening step may help coils that shrink tight and resist combing. Rinse lightly or leave a trace in place, then re-section. For children with curly hair, keep the same order but shorten the session. Detangle after bath time when hair is already wet, keep sections small, pause when the scalp pulls, and ask a pediatrician or dermatologist if tangling comes with breakage, pain or patchy loss.

FROM THE EDITORS

Single strand knots are medically known as trichonodosis. They form when an individual curly or coily strand loops and ties itself, and guidance suggests trimming every 3 to 6 months to keep them and split ends in check.

03

Cleanse the scalp in sections without stripping

Washing in sections keeps long hair from knotting into one web. Undo one clipped section at a time, keep the rest tucked away, and let lukewarm water run through from scalp to ends. Water temperature feels warm but not hot on the inner wrist, which supports comfort without roughing up the cuticle. Massage the scalp with fingertips, not nails, then let suds run down the lengths. There is no need to pile hair on top of the head or scrub the ends.

Shampoo choice follows buildup. Dermatologists advise choosing a moisturizing shampoo formulated for curly hair, and using a clarifying shampoo before it if styling with gels, oils, creams or pomades. The clarifying wash lifts film so the second wash can cleanse the scalp. Evidence does not say how often clarifying shampoo can be used without causing dryness, so watch how hair feels after rinsing. Tight, squeaky or straw-like lengths suggest clarifying too often or leaving it on too long.

Rinse each section fully before moving on, then re-twist or re-clip. If an anti-dandruff shampoo is part of the routine, dermatologists advise applying it only to the scalp and leaving it 2 to 10 minutes or the time on the label before rinsing. Longer is not better with these formulas. Between full washes, a shower cap protects styled hair in daily showers, and the scalp can be checked for tenderness, flakes or odor that signals it is time to wash sooner than planned.

The basic rhythm from the UK leaflet stays simple across patterns. Wash every 1 to 3 weeks, follow with rinse out conditioner with or without heat, detangle with care, dry gently and finish with leave in conditioner. That routine supports waves that need lighter layers as well as coils that need richer sealing. When scalp itching, scaling, soreness or hair loss appears, pause experimenting and speak with a dermatologist. For a child with persistent flakes, redness or scratching at night, check with a pediatrician.

04

Deep condition, then layer leave in products

Thick conditioner after washing supports moisturization, and dermatologists advise following it with oil or leave in conditioner. Deep conditioners are designed to remain on hair typically 10 to 30 minutes to penetrate the shaft. One guide suggests 10 to 15 minutes for a quick boost or 30 minutes for a deep moisturizing treatment. Use the longer time when ends feel rough, styles fall apart quickly or several weeks have passed since the last treatment.

Apply to mid lengths and ends in two or four sections, where dryness shows first. Smooth the product through with fingers, then detangle again gently with a wide tooth comb, fingers or detangling brush if needed. Cover with a shower cap to hold warmth. Rinse with lukewarm to cool water, which helps curls clump and feel smoother. Pat or squeeze with a soft towel or cotton shirt instead of rubbing, then keep hair in sections for styling.

Layering follows a light to firm order. A styling guide describes layering leave in conditioner with no hold, then cream, then medium flexible hold gel, then custard for extra hold. Waves may stop after leave in and a little gel. Curls often like leave in plus cream plus gel. Coils may use the full stack to keep definition. Smooth each layer down the section, then rake or shingle to separate curls. The amount should coat without coating the hands thickly. White residue, crunch that will not soften or a sticky scalp usually means too much product or layers applied too close to the roots.

FROM THE EDITORS

A narrative review in the International Journal of Womens Dermatology synthesized 2010 to 2024 literature on Afro-textured hair into six clinical domains. Reviews note limits in curly hair research and classification, so these steps reflect themes rather than settled rules.

05

Reduce knots, refresh between washes and keep tension low

Single strand knots love loose, dry ends rubbing through the week. Preventive guidance recommends braid or twist hair before bed and avoiding leaving hair loose while sleeping to reduce knots from friction. During the day, longer wash and go styles can raise knot counts on tight patterns. If knots recur, wear stretched styles more often, seal ends with a little oil or butter, and stretch ends without heat by banding, threading or loose twists. Use braids, twists

or buns to hold ends tucked when hair is prone to tangling. Trim every 3 to 6 months, and slide knots out gently instead of yanking. Evidence does not show whether specific oils, butters or gels prevent knots for all patterns, so treat sealing as support rather than promise.

Refresh days should feel lighter than wash day. Reactivate with a small amount of water misted over one area at a time, not a full soaking. Add the same gel only where hold is missing, spot treat dry ends with a drop of leave in or cream, then diffuse briefly for lift or air dry the rest of the way. Keep goals modest. Day three hair will not look like wash day hair, and chasing that match often adds buildup. If refresh stops working, with frizz at the roots, flat curls or an itchy scalp, plan the next wash instead of adding another layer.

Protective styles protect only when tension stays low. The UK leaflet states braids should not be left in longer than 6 weeks and should not be braided too tightly. Leave edge hairs out of braids, and avoid tying braids into tight ponytails or buns to reduce traction alopecia risk. Pain, throbbing, bumps, prolonged redness or tiny white bulbs at the hairline mean the style is too tight and should be loosened or removed. Heavy extensions add pull even when braids feel comfortable at first, so factor weight into the choice.

Night protection closes the loop. Dermatologists advise preserving curls at night with a loose pineapple ponytail or loose braid, twists, and satin or silk bonnets or pillowcases. The UK leaflet advises loosely plaiting or twisting hair at bedtime and covering with a satin or silk cap or scarf. Cotton pillowcases draw moisture and raise friction, which roughs ends and invites knots. If a bonnet slips, layer a satin pillowcase underneath so hair still slides. For persistent shedding, widening parts, bald patches, scalp pain or a child with flare-prone skin, seek care from a dermatologist or pediatrician before continuing with tight or long wear styles.

06

The checklist

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- ☐ Split hair into 4 to 8 loose sections before wetting
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- ☐ Mist one section wet, add leave in, finger detangle first
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- ☐ Comb from ends to roots with wide tooth comb
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- ☐ Wash one section at a time with moisturizing shampoo
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- ☐ Clarify first only if gels, oils, creams or pomades build up
-
- ☐ Leave anti-dandruff shampoo on scalp 2 to 10 minutes as labeled
-
- ☐ Deep condition mid lengths to ends 10 to 30 minutes
-
- ☐ Rinse lukewarm to cool, pat dry without rubbing
-
- ☐ Layer leave in, then cream, then gel, then custard as needed
-
- ☐ Seal ends lightly, tuck ends in twists or braids if knots recur
-
- ☐ Pineapple or loose twists nightly under satin or silk
-
- ☐ Keep braids loose, edges out, remove by 6 weeks
-
- ☐ Trim every 3 to 6 months and book care for pain or loss
-

07

Sources and further reading

- Afro-textured hair care: a narrative review and recommendations for dermatologists · [pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/)
- 6 Curly Hair Tips From Dermatologists Newswise · [newswise.com](https://www.newswise.com/)
- Caring for Afro-textured hair · bad.org.uk
- textured hair - The University of Nottingham · [nottingham.ac.uk](https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/)

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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Vanessa runs the news desk and the how-to guides at Body of Work. She follows every guide step by step at her own sink before it runs, with a kitchen timer on the counter.
