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# STOP FIGHTING YOUR CURLS: A GUIDE TO EMBRACING YOUR NATURAL HAIR TEXTURE

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*Straight hair has dominated the beauty scene for far too long. Ladies, follow this guide to unlock the potential of your lovely, textured hair. You will likely be surprised with the results.*

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Some of us are all too familiar with the scene: a young person, typically female, is urged to simply “brush that messy, frizzy hair.” And the outcome? Think Hermione from the *Harry Potter* novels, or perhaps Anne Hathaway in *The Princess Diaries*. That’s right, what was once a little frizzy is now downright bushy and out of control as the hair’s cuticles, or outer layer, reach to the heavens for moisture wherever they can find it. Is this you?



THE AUTHOR, BEFORE HER HAIR JOURNEY, AND TODAY, AFTER 5 YEARS OF PRACTICING THIS GUIDE

Why does this happen to so many women and girls, those who are simply trying to fit in and look more presentable? It’s quite simple, really – these ladies have wavy, curly, or otherwise textured hair. It is estimated that as much as 65 percent of the population in the U.S. alone has hair that falls into one of these categories.<sup>1</sup> These women feel societal pressure to adhere to a beauty standard that is actually doing them a disservice in the healthy hair department. Often the sentiment that “straight hair is better” is passed down through families, who see curly or wavy hair as messy and unmanageable, and this notion has historically even been used to actively discriminate against African-American women in the workplace and beyond. Stores have typically segregated products by ethnicity, and many feel that new attempts to “Break the Walls,” by encouraging mainstream brands that haven’t historically catered to textured hair to start producing and marketing curly hair products, will allow for a more inclusive shopping experience.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Breyer, M. (2019, March 13). Curl Disconnect: Are Retailers Meeting the Need of the Textured Hair Consumers? Retrieved from <https://www.naturallycurly.com/curlreading/curls/curl-disconnect-are-retailers-meeting-the-need-of-the-textured-hair-consumers>

In this modern era, why not turn the tables on these sentiments, on the idea that straight hair is somehow superior? This guide will give you, wavy, curly, or coily haired reader, the tools you need to embrace the full potential of your textured hair. Because we are programmed not to value curly hair, we try to beat it into submission to look like straight hair. But if you are willing to put in a little effort and stop trying to make your hair something it is not (straight), you might be surprised with the results.

## BEFORE YOU DO ANYTHING...

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Before you dive right in for your first wash day, it is important to take care of a couple of preliminary steps to make sure your hair has a proper foundation for your regular haircare routine. These are steps that you will only need to follow once, before doing anything else:

### • ASSESS YOUR HAIR: THE BIG 3 •

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#### 1. CURL TYPE

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The first thing you will need to do as you begin your hair journey is to assess some of your hair's properties in order to determine how to treat it. Start by looking at a small section of hair that you have not straightened with heat styling tools. Take a look at the images below and compare your hair to find your **curl type**. Does your hair match the **wavy, curly, or coily/kinky** sample? This is the first step in determining what sort of ingredients, products, and techniques will make your hair thrive. For example, my hair, as seen in the introductory photograph, is in the **curly** category (though it can often appear wavy after days in a ponytail).



WAVY, CURLY, & COILY/KINKY HAIR EXAMPLES

*Psst: What's Your Number? If you research curly hair tips online, you will find that some people like to label their curl pattern using a system of numbers and letters, i.e. 2a, 3b, 4c, etc. Trying to narrow your curl type down this way is tempting, but it might overcomplicate the process. You'll find that such a specific description of your curls may not actually be very useful when it comes to choosing your hair care method.*

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## 2. DENSITY

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Next, take a single strand of your hair and examine its thickness. Roll it around in your fingers. Does it feel like nothing is there? You, my friend, have **fine** hair. If you can feel the hair between your fingers, you likely have **medium** density hair. If you can feel it and it feels quite strong and thick, you have **coarse** hair. Determining the density of your hair in this way will help you narrow down products that will work for you. You don't want to put heavy products on fine hair, for example, as this can weigh it down and make it fall quite flat. And curls are all about embracing that volume!

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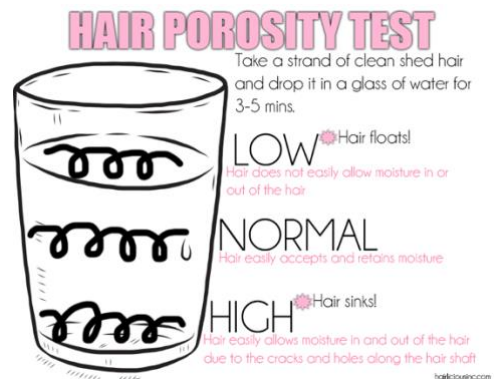
## 3. POROSITY

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The other important property that makes up the Big 3 is your hair's **porosity**. This is determined by how porous your hair's cuticle is, and there are a couple of ways to figure this out.

One way is to do what's called a float test. Take a few strands of clean hair and put them in a bowl of water. If your hair floats on the surface, this is a good sign you have **low porosity** hair. If it sinks about halfway down, or eventually to the bottom, you likely have **normal porosity** hair. If it sinks down rather quickly, you have **high porosity** hair.

You can also test the porosity of your hair by spraying a section with water from a spray bottle. If your hair is low porosity, you will likely see the water bead off a bit, with the hair not getting saturated. If it becomes saturated quickly, you likely have high porosity hair. And if the water absorption is somewhere in the middle, you have normal porosity hair.



If you know that your hair normally takes forever to dry, that's another good indicator you might have low porosity hair, whereas high porosity hair dries rather quickly.

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### • THE RESET WASH: PREPARE A FOUNDATION WITH A THOROUGH CLEANSE •

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Ok, so you have an idea of your textured hair's general properties. Before you settle in to a regular routine of cleansing, conditioning, etc., the other preliminary step you need to complete is what's known in the curly community as a **reset wash**. This is a one-time step! This is actually pretty simple – just wash your hair, using a shampoo containing **sulfates**. This will likely be the shampoo you already have in your shower. Sulfates are powerful cleansing agents, and you will often find them listed on an ingredients label as sodium laurel sulfate, ammonium lauryl sulfate, etc. One shampoo that is popular for reset washes is *Suave's Daily Clarifying Shampoo*. It is inexpensive and sold in most grocery stores.

These cleansing agents are critical for the reset wash because in order to treat your textured hair properly, we need to make sure there are no occlusive agents hanging around on your hair. Things like

butters, waxes, and silicones – these ingredients effectively coat the outside of your hair strands, leaving them unable to soak up all of that good moisture you’re going to give them.

After you do that reset wash, your next step...is to throw that shampoo in the trash! Well, if you want to be eco-friendly, you can give it to a friend. But you are **not** to use that shampoo on your hair again. After the one-time reset wash, you may proceed to [Step 2: Conditioning](#) in the following instructions.

## NOW THAT’S OUT OF THE WAY, LET’S DIVE IN TO YOUR REGULAR HAIR ROUTINE

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With those preliminary steps out of the way, it is now time to begin your new process of maintaining your textured hair. These are simply the steps you will take each time you wash and style your hair. These are techniques you’ve likely followed all of your life, but adjusted to ensure that your hair retains maximum moisture, leading to defined curls and/or waves.

### 1. SELECTING A CLEANSER

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Your process will begin with the same step straight haired people do first: **washing**. But the way you do it will be quite different. Based on your hair properties as determined earlier in [Step 1 of The Big 3](#), select a cleanser that will be appropriate for *your* hair. This will involve trial and error, so feel free to err on the side of inexpensive for your products. For example, if your hair is wavy and fine with low porosity, you will probably experience build-up from using heavier products. A shampoo using minimal suds, also called a **low-poo**, might be your best friend as it will thoroughly cleanse your hair without stripping it.

You probably already have seen these low-poo cleansers in stores – many shampoos that have the words “sulfate-free” on the label already fit the bill. You will find that fewer suds are produced with these products, but they contain plenty of gentle detergents to effectively cleanse your hair. One specific product that works for a lot of women is *Giovanni’s Smooth as Silk Deep Moisture Shampoo*. Most any shampoo from the *SheaMoisture* brand should work as well.

If your hair is thick and coily with high porosity, you might benefit from **co-washing**, or using conditioner at your roots to massage your scalp. Yes, conditioner can cleanse your hair just like shampoo can – it has cleansing agents in it, and the friction you create with your fingertips on your scalp will ensure excess dirt and product is removed. But it will leave your hair’s natural oils behind, which will help protect your hair’s cuticles.

There are also many commercial products on the market nowadays called co-washes that might provide an even more thorough clean. One example is *As I Am Coconut CoWash*, which is a curly community favorite that can be found in most drugstores.



Since my hair, which you’ll recall can be seen in the introductory photos, is considered **curly**, I tend to use a moisturizing shampoo such as *Bounce Curl Pure Silk Moisturizing Shampoo* or the *Giovanni* shampoo mentioned previously. Since I exercise often and shampoo infrequently (as you should also do

– read on), I tend to prefer a sudsy cleanse. Plus, my hair is on the finer side and co-washes can be tricky as a result.

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## INGREDIENTS TO AVOID

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If your hair properties fall somewhere in the middle, you can experiment. The most important thing to remember when selecting a cleanser, however, is to avoid a couple of ingredients that could lead to problems down the road. These are **sulfates** and **silicones**.

But wait a minute. Didn't I tell you to use a sulfate shampoo for your reset wash?

I sure did. But here's the thing: sulfates in shampoos used on a regular basis can be very drying for wavy, curly, and coily/kinky hair types. They will strip your hair of that precious moisture that it needs to look its best. We needed to use it at first, to make sure the hair had a clean slate for proper care going forward, but from here on you will want to avoid it. Unless you like frizzy hair, of course. As for silicones, well, see [Step 2: Conditioning](#).

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## CLEANSING TECHNIQUE

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Whichever cleanser you use, be sure to concentrate it at your scalp, giving it a good scrub. There is no reason to cleanse the ends of your hair, as the cleanser from your roots will cleanse the ends of your hair as it rinses out. Try not to wash your hair very often – shoot for a few times a week at the most. That might feel difficult at first, if you're used to daily washings. As your hair adjusts to these new techniques, it might even feel a bit oily or greasy at first. This is *normal*. Stick with it the process, and things will normalize as your hair's health improves.

***Psst: Technique Check.** Many people find that they can get good volume and reduce frizz by flipping their hair upside down in the shower as they wash, condition, and style it. This might help you really get your scalp clean as well. Give it a try and see if this works for you!*

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## 2. CONDITIONING: THE MOST CRUCIAL STEP

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**This is the most important step of caring for your textured hair.** If you learn nothing else from this guide, I hope you at least hear this. Since textured hair is often crying out for moisture, it is vital to put a lot of **moisture** into it when you treat your hair. This will help with frizz and defining your curls. And it will have a cumulative effect.

To select a conditioner, pay attention to your hair's attributes from [Step 1: Cleansing](#), especially the porosity. Again, inspect that product's label thoroughly. If you have fine, high porosity hair, you will want something creamy enough to help smooth your hair's porous cuticle, but you will want to be very careful not to choose something too heavy that will weigh your hair down. Again, experimentation is key. Many curlies get good results using *GVP Conditioning Balm* from *Sally Beauty* stores.

Your hair is coily and highly porous? You might be able to handle heavier ingredients, like shea butter. In time, you will recognize what ingredients make your hair feel its best. But regardless of your curl type and porosity, you will want to continue to avoid **silicones**. Silicones are conditioning agents that coat and smooth the hair shaft, helping keep out humidity. That sounds great, right? And you're right, they are not inherently bad. But if you use them on your hair, you will need to use a strong shampoo to remove them, likely containing...you guessed it...sulfates.

You may notice that silicones make your hair feel "good," but they will lead to build-up when used with low-poo and co-washes, as those cleansers won't remove them from the hair. So you would have to return to sulfate shampoos, starting the cycle of damage all over again. It's best to simply steer clear of them, using conditioners that can be easily washed out.



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## APPLICATION

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When you apply your conditioner, use much more than the label indicates. Use much more than you were taught. A quarter-sized blob? Ha. That's for straight-haired folks. Use a shallow palmful to really coat your strands, focusing on the ends. I know this amount seems a bit crazy, but your hair *needs* it. Of course, as your hair's health improves you might be able to ease up a bit on the amount. But wavy, curly, and coily/kinky hair needs moisture to really thrive.

This is the **only** stage during which you may use a wide-toothed comb to detangle your hair – when it is coated with conditioner in your shower. Finger-combing is even better. In fact, you won't use many hair tools at all as you embrace your natural texture. Read on for [Step 3: Styling](#) to learn more.

You can rinse your conditioner out, but if it is not too heavy you might want to leave some in, or use a separate commercial leave-in conditioner. Some people leave *all* of their conditioner in early in their textured hair journey. Experiment! Conditioner will lead to hair hydration when it is married with that magical element: water. Really squish your conditioner into your hair to get that moisture in there.

***Psst: Let's talk techniques.** If you search the internet for curly hair tips, you will likely find many acronyms and expressions that sound bizarre to you. Squish to condish? SOTC? The Bowl Method? Plopping? Whaaaat? Do not be overwhelmed. You don't have to use any of these methods to get good results. But if you enjoy experimenting, have at it once you've mastered the basics. Well, SOTC might be a basic – more on that later.*

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## 3. STYLING: LOCK IN THAT STYLE AND MAKE IT LAST

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So you have beautifully hydrated hair. Now what? Now you will want to lock in that curl, giving it **hold** to last until your next wash (which should *not* be the next day, if you're paying attention). The first thing you will do for styling is to *not* dry your hair *at all*. In fact, you might find it easiest to remain in the shower and have your styling products in there with you. This is because your hair will look best if you make sure it's **soaking wet** when you apply stylers. All that hydration from the water and conditioner will cause your hair strands to stay together in their curl families, and then you can lock that curl in place with a product.



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## PRODUCT TYPES

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As far as products go, again look to your particular curl type and properties. Thicker haired folks might like the extra hydration they get from a **cream** product, but these might be too much for finer hair with low porosity. Creams also do not generally provide strong hold. For a strong hold, look to that 80s staple: that's right, **gel**. I know, I know. But you can avoid that dated, crunchy look, I promise. Read on. You can also layer a cream under a gel for a soft feel and a medium to strong hold.

Specific curl creams that work for a lot of curly-haired women are *SheaMoisture Curl Enhancing Smoothie* (best for coily-haired gals) and *Cantu Curl Activator Cream*. As for gel, one recommendation that works for many, including the author, is *L.A. Looks Extreme Sport Styling Gel*. This blue wonder comes in a huge bottle for very little money, and may give readers who lived through the 80s some mild PTSD. Again, fear not!

*Psst: Can I Still Straighten My Hair? That, reader, is a very personal question. While your hair is undoubtedly your own and it is understandable you might wish to change up your style, be very cautious about using heat and styling tools to "occasionally" straighten your hair. Using a blow dryer with heat can cause frizz, of course, and using a flat iron tool to coax your locks into submission could cause even more extreme damage. It takes time for a curl pattern to be nourished to its full potential, and just one flirtation with that iron may undo weeks or even months of hard work. Try exploring heat-free methods of hair straightening if you just can't help yourself!*

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## INGREDIENTS & APPLICATION

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Whatever product(s) you choose, make sure it is free of **silicones** and **drying alcohols**, and do not be afraid to use more than you think you need. If your hair is long, a palmful of gel will likely be necessary. Yes, as you smooth this over your soaking wet hair, it will feel strange. But magic is coming. To help encourage your curls to form, scrunch upward from the bottom of your hair up toward your scalp. You should hear a "squishy" sound if you have enough water and product in there. That's a good thing.

Out of the shower, use a microfiber towel or an old t-shirt to squeeze any excess moisture out of your hair. You can use small clips near the roots of your hair to encourage volume, if you like. And then...get on with your day, and **do not touch your hair!** Ideally, you will be home for a while and can allow your hair to air dry. Make a point to do this for all of your wash days near the beginning of your journey. You might be able to use a diffuser on low heat in the future, but try to avoid it at first.

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## HANDS OFF

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Again, the most important thing to remember while your hair is drying is to not touch it. Don't rake your fingers through it, don't comb or brush it. **Actually, you can just go ahead and get rid of that hair brush now.** That's right, brushing your hair, or combing it when it is dry and not full of conditioner, will actually destroy that curl pattern you worked so hard to bring out in [Steps 2 and 3](#). Handling your hair at all during the drying stage will create frizz, as will the use of a regular cotton, terry-cloth towel.

When your hair is *completely dry*, you will notice that the product you applied has caused a **cast** to form around your hair – it should feel hard, almost crunchy. Time for that magic to happen. Take your hands and gently scrunch your hair from the ends toward the scalp, much like you did when you applied the product in the shower. This is called **Scrunching out the Crunch (SOTC)**, and it is crucial. Feel free to fluff it a bit at the roots. As long as you used enough product, your hair will magically feel soft yet have a nice hold. No 80s crunch here. Just waves, curls, or coils that last until your next wash (weather-permitting – we can't control everything can we?).

*Psst: But What Happens When I Sleep? You might find that all of your hard work seems to have been for nothing if you sleep on your hair the same way you always have. Many curlies like to use sleep protection techniques to make their style last. The easiest thing to do is to buy a 100% silk pillowcase. Silk does not absorb moisture the way cotton does. You could alternatively use a scarf to wrap your hair (a satin weave of silk or even polyester would work). To make sure your curls aren't crushed, you can gather your hair into a loose ponytail on top of your head in what the curl community calls a **pineapple** (pictured). Experiment with what's most comfortable for you.*



And that's it! You may benefit from an occasional deep conditioner or gentle clarifying wash, but if you simply follow [Steps 1-2-3](#) on a regular basis, over time you should notice that your hair is wavier or curlier than it once appeared. This is because it is no longer being stripped by harsh shampoos, brushed, subjected to hot tools...you name it. The things we do to our curls to try to match our straight-haired friends can be very damaging. Embrace your natural texture and treat your hair with gentle care, and you might be amazed at the results.