

# *A Curly Girl's Essentials*

**A Guide for Navigating Your Curly Mane**



**by Nay, founder of My Curly Mane**  
**[mycurlymane.com](http://mycurlymane.com)**

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# MyCurlyMane

## A Curly Girl's Essentials

Dear Curlie,

Congratulations on having (or thinking about revealing) a beautiful, curly mane!

You probably stumbled upon this eBook while visiting MyCurlyMane, a natural hair care blog written by me. I created this site to share tips on maintaining natural tresses (and pass along a few life lessons) based on what I've learned from my lifelong experience having naturally curly hair.

Believe me. It took some time before I learned how to properly maintain and really embrace my 'fro. I hope this eBook will ease your journey and help you achieve your goals. Whether you are a newbie who is trying to find your way around your mane or a pro who can easily navigate through the latest styles, this eBook is for you. Hang on to these essentials as a reminder of the basic TLC your hair needs.

Please note that the information provided in this guide is not guaranteed. It is based on what has worked for me and other curlies. It is my sincere hope that these tips will also work for you.

If you have any questions, email me at [nay@mycurlymane.com](mailto:nay@mycurlymane.com) or tweet me @mycurlymane.

Thank you for your support. Good luck and many blessings.

Happy Reading!



*Nay*

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# Do's and Don'ts To Remember

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“I will embrace and celebrate other curlies as well as my own hair. I will use their gorgeous tresses to motivate and encourage me to respect and nurture my curly mane.” ~Nay

Whether you strategically big chopped, cut your hair on a whim, or grew out your curly mane, I commend you on embracing your natural texture. This journey will have peaks and valleys as you re-introduce yourself to your hair or discover it for the first time. While you embark on this journey, I advise you to please follow the tips contained in this guide.

First things first. I've listed several mantras for you below. Please read them at least twice (no skimming!) and lock them into memory (hand over that key!).

## Do

**Find time to play in your hair.** You may have gotten reprimanded for this in your youth. No more. You need to explore the twists and bends that make up your hair, and this will take time. I understand that working gals are strapped for time, so please take a

minimum of 5 minutes before bed or 10 minutes on the weekends to study your curly mane.

**Compliment your fellow curlies.** I always find it strange that hair hating and competition takes place in our curly community. All girls need a little shout out and affirmation that their hair looks good that day. Pay it forward.

**Read up on blogs and news about curly hair.** It will help you to recognize hair issues such as sensitivity to protein and products, issues you may not have faced or may not realize that you did face before.

**Nail down a simple routine for a while.** This will allow you the time needed to pay attention to your hair as opposed to the products you are using. You will be able to see how your hair reacts to your set product and routine throughout seasons.

**Be gentle while handling your hair.** No ripping combs and brushes through it. You will damage your hair strands.

**Be patient, and you will achieve your hair goals.** Unless you are ailing, all hair grows. Period. The trick is to retain the length and health of your growth. With proper care, you will achieve your desired length.

**Embrace your texture and stop obsessing over hair typing.** Yes, we all have different size curls, and one size doesn't make us have better hair than the other. A lot of us have at least three different textures on our heads. Yes! Do not fret. You are normal, and your hair is uniquely fab! Also, please, please note that shrinkage comes with the territory. It is what it is.

**Get your curly essentials.** These are the tools and tidbits you need in your arsenal. Read the other chapters in this guide for a list of essential items.

**Listen to your hair.** I say this time and time again. If your hair is dry, try moisturizing it. If it's suddenly feeling rough, check your styler. You won't know what route to take unless you listen to your hair and pay attention to its needs.

**Embrace and love your hair!**

## **Don't!**

**Beat yourself up for not looking like another curlie.** Each mane is unique, and yours is fine as is.

**Assume your hair cannot be styled in a certain manner without trying it first.** Natural hair is versatile and can look many different ways just through styling techniques.

**Assume your hair will never grow.** You may just be staring at the mirror too long. Step away curlie. Step. Away. Just like my mom always says, “A watched pot does not boil.”

**Buy every product under the sun.** Yep, made this mistake. Try a handful first, experimenting with one product for three days to a full week. Try different styles, utilizing that one product. What may not work on a wash and go may work magic in your braid-outs.

**Freak out by all the natural hair information that is out there.** Instead, slowly digest this information at your own pace, always going back to study your hair.

**Force tools and techniques to work.** Your hair will let you know if a Denman brush is ripping it out or if a styler is drying it out. Just pay attention. Listen to your mane.

**Listen to negative comments as to why you changed your hair.** You made a great decision. Don't let other people's negativity affect you. No Negative Nancies!

**Give up and go back to the creamy crack!** Give your hair a chance and time to thrive. Your hair may change due to your diet, hormones, hair growth, hair care, etc. My hair today is much different from how it was a few years ago. Through time, patience, and care, my hair is stronger and healthier looking than it's been in a long while.

**Ignore your hair because you are overwhelmed with its new look and feel.**

Once again, you must breathe and have patience. This is all very new to you. Please realize that it will take time to physically and emotionally adjust to a new version of you. Change is good.

**Hide your hair because you feel awkward or different.** Put your curly mane on full display. Stat! It is yours and only yours. Have no shame at how God made you. Wear it proudly! Go ahead. Weeerk!

# Essential Tidbits & Tools For You To Use

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“A girl without braids is like a city without bridges.” ~ Roman Payne, Rooftop Soliloquy

The net is bubbling up with information on caring for naturally curly hair. Woo hoo! While there are more resources at our fingertips, it also makes it a bit more difficult to find simple, basic information on how to care for natural hair. I don't want to confuse you even more, particularly you newbies out there.

Instead, I'm going to break down for you a few essential items that every curly girl needs in her stash. For my easy, breezy minimalist gals, this one's up your alley! The products for natural hair and tools below are listed in the order in which they're most likely used.



## 1. Moisturizing & Clarifying Shampoo / Sulfate Free Shampoo

If you are using products (mainly stylers aka products used to style your hair) that contain mineral oil or non-water soluble silicones, you will need to use a shampoo to clarify your curly mane. Mineral oil and silicones can trap moisture within your strands or prevent it from entering your hair shaft. They tend to build up onto natural hair, which is why they are best removed with shampoos.

Typically, shampoos contain sodium lauryl sulfate, a detergent that creates a foamy lather and strips hair of its natural oils. Frequent shampooing dries out our curly manes, making them susceptible to breakage. Unless your hair is naturally oily, please shampoo minimally. Your best bet is to purchase a shampoo that is also moisturizing or just wash your hair with conditioner.

If you're following Lorraine Massey's Curly Girl Method ([Curly Girl: The Handbook](#)) aka the noo poo (no shampoo)/co-washing (conditioner washing) method, there may be times in which your curly, natural hair may become over moisturized. Yep, would you believe that one? Hair that is holding in too much moisture will be limp. If you fall under this category, use a sulfate free shampoo to clarify and help wake up your strands. Just an aside, a protein treatment may help as well.

### Recommendations:

- Sulfate-free: [Miss Jessie's Crème De La Curl Cleansing Crème](#)
- Moisturizing: [Creme of Nature Detangling Ultra Moisturizing Conditioning Shampoo](#) and [Dabur Vatika Moisturizing Shampoo with Sweet Almond](#)

\*Please note that the links above and throughout this eBook will direct you to sites where you can purchase products. If you purchase a product, a small commission will be sent to me, which will be used to maintain MyCurlyMane.com. Thank you! This is of no additional cost to you.

## 2. Moisturizing Conditioner

This is a must, especially if you use shampoo. Conditioners help to restore the moisture that shampoos take away. Not to mention, they add necessary slip for detangling tresses. In addition, conditioners can be left in your hair as a styler. This is known as Teri LaFlesh's Tightly Curly Method. While I haven't had success with this method, it may prove positive for you.

Recommendation: [Herbal Essence's Hello Hydration](#) (good stuff!)

## 3. Leave-in Conditioner

Another must have! Leave-ins are crucial to many, if not most, curly girls. When used under your styler and sealed with oil (unless your styler contains enough oils), leave-ins keep curly hair moisturized. It also adds definition and reduces frizz.

You can use a regular conditioner as a leave-in, just beware that some conditioners react to stylers and cause white balls to appear on one's hair. Not all products play together nicely. 😊

Recommendations: Last year, I switched from using Avanti Silicon Mix to [Beautiful Textures Tangle Taming Leave-in Conditioner](#). Now, I am loving and highly recommend [As I Am's leave-in](#). Warning: Keep your product junkism in check! To help, check out [my product reviews](#) over at MyCurlyMane.

## 4. Wide Tooth Comb/Detangling Brush

Unless you're seeking a wickedly neat part, leave your fine tooth combs in the back of your draw. Our tresses need wide tooth combs to easily glide their way

through our hair. They are extremely helpful when paired with a moisturizing conditioner to detangle hair in the shower. Some curlies prefer to use a Denman brush or Tangle Teezer to smooth strands and remove shed hairs. This is particularly helpful if you're using the Tightly Curly Method mentioned above. I prefer wide-tooth combs, as I'm one of those curlies who gets serious shrinkage and loses a lot hair from brushes. Try them both and see.

## 5. Oil and/or Butter

Your curly mane may work well with a butter, oil ... or both! Either one will seal moisture into your strands, literally making your hair feel like butta! This should be included as a key step while styling your hair. You can also use oil or butter as a heat protectant when straightening. In addition (yes, there's more!), they can be used nightly to seal moisture into your hair or help to soften and revive your look in the morning.

Recommendations: Almond Oil, Coconut Oil, [Dabur Vatika Coconut Hair Oil](#), Jojoba Oil, and Olive Oil.

## 6. Styler

Not every girl needs a styler, but this curlie does. Stylers are products that literally help to style your hair. They can increase definition, freeze curls, and reduce shrinkage. Stylers prevent my hair from completely transforming into a cotton ball. If this is your desired look, then skip it.

Recommendations: III Sisters of Nature Curly Whip Pudding, [Eco Styler Gel](#), [Fruit of the Earth 100% Aloe Vera Gel](#), Fantasia IC Olive Oil Style Gel, Hair Rules Kinky Curling Cream, and Miss Jessie's Quick Curls.

## **7. Hair Clips**

They aid in styling your hair or can be used as part of your finished look. Hair clips section your hair while you work through your head. They are particularly helpful as your hair grows longer. It's either that or invest in more hands!

## **8. Spray Bottle**

Water is nature's moisturizer. It is a curly girl's best friend. At some point in your regimen, you'll need a spray bottle to help douse your hair as you style it. If you're into rewetting your hair throughout the day, a spray bottle will ease the process.

## **9. Satin or Silk Pillowcase/ Scarf/Sleeping Cap**

Another must! Satin and silk materials do not absorb the moisture in your hair (unlike cotton), thereby preventing your hair from drying out and breaking. Your hair will effortlessly slip across the fabric. Satin/silk pillow cases also do not cause creases across your face like cotton pillowcases, thereby reducing wrinkles. In addition, it combats "bed head" and smushed 'fros.

## **10. Camera**

This is a must for chronicling your curls. Documenting your hair journey through photos and/or videos will help you to keep track of your routine and hair health. Aside from badgering your friends, how else will you know what's working for you?

Once you have these items, you're pretty much set to go. For those of you in pursuit of growing your natural hair, these items will keep you on course. Of course, if you are seeking additional styling aids, there are tons of other tools (hair dryers, steamers, etc.) and products which you can add to your arsenal. Don't worry. I'll keep you posted! 😊

# How to Moisturize Natural Hair

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If I were to place a bet, I would guess that you share a similarity with most curlies—the need for moooiiiisture. In case you don't already know, natural hair must remain hydrated. Without it, your hair will poof, dry out, split its ends, and break.

**Note:** Your hair consists of a cuticle layer, which is the outermost, shingle-like layer of hair. It is made of keratin and protects the cortex aka hair's middle layer surrounding the medulla (the innermost layer found in coarse hair). The cortex provides strength, texture, and color. The cuticle can open or close, allowing moisture to enter or exit the hair shaft. Ultimately, you want to close your cuticles and allow them to lay flat.

To help keep your hair healthy (and less temperamental), always remember to keep it supple through the following tips.

## **1. Start With A Clean Slate**

Make sure that you clarify your hair with a moisturizing shampoo or baking soda. If you don't have a curl-friendly shampoo, use 1/2 shampoo and 1/2 conditioner to wash your hair. Also remember to avoid shampooing your hair often throughout the week (approximately every 3 days work for me). You want to remove products that have built up onto your hair without completely and continuously stripping away your natural oils, which are necessary for keeping hair supple.

## **2. Remember That Water Is Your Friend**

With freshly pressed tresses, you must avoid contact with water, or your hair will revert to its curly state. Natural hair, on the other hand, needs water to thrive. It is a curls' best friend. It is nature's moisturizer, so seek water-based products, particularly leave-in conditioners. Just don't forget to seal. See details below.

## **3. Seal The Deal**

Once you moisturize your hair, you must seal this in with either an oil or butter. Oils/butters will trap in (not create) moisture within your strands. They also add sheen, de-stiffen hard products, and nourish hair. See the next chapter for more details on sealing natural hair with oil.

When I seal my curly mane, I work in sections throughout my head. I layer either of the following as successful combinations:

Moisturizer (leave-in conditioner) + Oil/Butter (coconut) + Styler (Aloe Vera Gel)

OR

Moisturizer + Styler + Oil/Butter

#### **4. Try Kind Stylers**

Watch out for stylers that strip your hair of moisture, particularly products that contain mineral oil and/or silicone. As mentioned prior, both products coat rather than absorb into the hair shaft and form a barrier that can either seal in moisture (a good thing) or prevent it from entering into the hair (nooo!). Some curlies have had varied results with these two.

Other stylers may contain humectants like aloe vera gel, honey, or glycerin. By design, humectants cause water retention and will draw moisture into or out of the hair depending on humidity levels. This is particularly helpful during the summer months, as these ingredients will help draw moisture from the atmosphere into dry hair. Be cautious during the winter months, as these same humectants may draw moisture out from your hair and into the dryer atmosphere. [Click here to read more about humidity and humectants.](#)

#### **5. Deep Treat**

Condition. Condition. Condition! I can't stress enough the importance of using conditioner. Traditional conditioners and leave-in conditioners will fortify your strands and prevent them from breaking, particularly during the winter. Your hair will need this more than ever, so use a conditioner/leave-in each time you wash your hair. Don't forget to apply extra conditioner to the ends of your hair to prevent them from splitting. These old timers are easily weakened by the elements, so give 'em a little lovin'.

Deep conditioning under a hooded dryer or steaming curls weekly for 30 minutes can rejuvenate curls. You can also coat your hair in conditioners and cover it with a plastic cap for a few hours. Both techniques helped me to rehab my heat damaged curls. They should also work for you.



## 6. Freshen Up

Fill a spray bottle with water or water and glycerin (a humectant). Spritz your hair throughout the day, as needed. I've tried this method but soon gave up the practice because:

- I always had flat, wet hair, which I didn't like. I prefer fuller, dry looks.
- This was difficult to carry off in an office environment. It was a bit too high maintenance to continuously monitor and spritz throughout the day.
- It made me look like I was rocking some Soul Glo! Whomp whomp. Unless your goal is to capture the Jheri Curled look, go light with the spritzing.

While it didn't work for me, don't let this discourage you. Remember everyone's hair differs, and your curly mane may love this approach.



## 7. Easy Does It

Waaaiit foor iiiit ... If you overdo the above mentioned tips, your hair will become over moisturized, resulting in soggy, noodle-like hair that's excessively elastic to the point of breakage. Over moisturized hair needs protein to reverse this problem. Try a protein-based deep treatment like ApHogee and stylers like protein-rich [Eco Styler Gel](#) to revive your curls.

Yes, yes, this is indeed tricky and requires balance, but I recommend that you try any of these steps and report back. If you've got additional tips, come on in; the water is fine! Share your secrets over at My Curly Mane!

## Why You Need To Seal The Deal

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On the left, my hair with a leave-in conditioner & aloe vera gel. I forgot to seal my leave-in with an oil.  
On the right, later in the day, my hair poofed out because of the lack of oil.

Is your hair dry? Is it poofing out more than desired? Come closely. Very closely. Very, very closely. Okay, that's good enough! This one may not be a big secret to you, but I'll whisper a single key word, "ooooiiiiillsss."

My curly mane has been thanking me since I introduced carrier oils into my routine. Not to be confused with essential oils (lavender, peppermint, etc.), carrier oils are derived from seeds, nuts, and vegetables.

All of your conditioning will be in vain if you don't seal in your hair's moisture with an oil or butter. It's hard enough for sebum (natural oils from your scalp that moisturize your hair) to travel down your coily hair, so you'll need to add oils or butters instead. They tend to seal and/or penetrate the hair shaft, locking moisture into hair and reducing frizz. It also adds sheen to hair. Most oils can be used to moisturize the scalp.

They also work wonders on your skin and nails. You can use these nourishing oils alone or combine them with essential oils, mainly to dilute and literally “carry” the essential oils onto the skin. I’ve never tried this combo due to the heavy scents that essentials have, but try it, and please report back!

## OILS & BUTTERS

Oils and butters really do work wonders on natural hair. As already stated, they seal the deal, temporarily locking moisture into hair. Given this, their application should be included as a key step during your styling process. In fact, there are a couple of ways in which they (particularly oils) can be used.

## USES

- **Hot Oil Treatment** – Help prep your hair/cuticles for the harshness of shampooing by doing a hot oil treatment. Combine your favorite oils with conditioners and wrap your hair with a towel or plastic cap. You can sit under a dryer or leave the mix in your hair for at least 30 minutes. This should be done prior to washing your hair.
- **Shampoo Booster** – Shampoos strip natural oils from the hair. You can prevent this by adding your oil(s) of choice to your shampoo to make it more moisturizing. Have you noticed the influx of oil-based shampoos? If you haven’t snagged one ... make your own!
- **Deep Conditioner** – Like hot oil treatments, deep conditioning helps to pack moisture into your hair. Oils help to condition the hair and scalp while also treating split ends.

**Note:** If you do get second, third, fourth, etc. day hair by using oils, you may need to rehydrate your curls by spritzing with water/a water mix and re-sealing your strands.



On left, coconut oil. On right, shea butter.

## RECOMMENDED OILS

The oils below can be used topically and/or on your scalp. Please note that you do not need to use them all. These are the all-stars that work on my curly mane.

**Almond Oil** – I once swore by this oil before discovering Vatika Oil. Almond Oil is rich with Vitamin E, which means that it nourishes hair. It adds sheen and locks in moisture. It is believed that ancient Egyptians used this oil in their beauty routine, but then again, many of these oils have been traditionally used long ago by savvy ladies across the globe.

**Avocado Oil** - I love, love to chow down on avocado. Blame it on me being a Caribbean girl. Now you could only imagine my excitement upon discovering avocado oil. Hey, if it's good for the tummy, it's got to be good for my hair, right? ... Yes, it is! This oil contains vitamins A, E, and D, which are grade A elements for hair. This oil is a great sealant for my tresses. It is also an ingredient in my oil mix (see below).

**\*Coconut Oil** – This nearly tops the list for my curly mane. It comes in second place, behind Vatika Oil. Coconut oil smells soooo good, and it contains Vitamins E and fatty acids that combat dandruff. It can actually penetrate the hair shaft, where it helps reduce protein loss. It can thicken hair and reduce premature graying. It works wonders on porous strands and definitely helped my hair rehab from heat damaged. This oil best assists my hair in retaining moisture. I use it topically or on my scalp. It is also an ingredient in my oil mix (see below).

**Jamaican Black Castor Oil (JBCO)** – With its well-known dark color (due to the roasting of castor beans) and nutty smell, this oil is proven to be extremely effective in helping to grow hair. How? JBCO increases the flow of blood to the scalp. It also contains Vitamin E and Omega 6 fatty acids, which moisturizes the hair follicle. This oil is thiiiiick, so use it sparingly. I like to combine it with other oils and apply it to my scalp. I also apply it to my hair ends during winter.

**Jojoba Oil** – This oil is excellent at penetrating the scalp and hair shaft. It's recommended for treating scalp build up. Rich with vitamin E, jojoba has many of the same properties as sebum, the natural, moisturizing oil produced by your scalp to reduce hair loss. Jojoba works well with oily or dry scalp. Once again, you can use this topically or on your scalp.

**Extra Virgin Olive Oil aka EVOO** – This famous oil not only pairs well with bread (delish!), it also works wonders on natural hair. Derived from olives and green in color, EVOO soothes the scalp. This is particularly helpful for smoothing hair cuticles.

\*Indicates my seal of approval.

**Dabur Vatika Oil** – My absolute favorite oil blend! This product makes my hair soooft. It's enriched with a mixture of goodies:

- Amla (Indian Gooseberry) – delays graying & prevents hair loss
- Bahera (ayurvedic herb) – nourishes hair & maintains its color
- Brahmi – nourishes hair & promotes growth
- Coconut Oil – retains hair's moisture
- Cow's Milk – nourishes the scalp
- Harar – cleanses hair
- Kapur Kachari – an antiseptic
- Henna – conditions hair & is a colorant (although this product will not color your hair)
- Lemon Oil – controls sebum flow
- Neem – strengthens hair & fights dandruff

### **\*\*MY CURLY MANE'S OIL COMBO \*\***

I like to keep it creative and mix them all together! I combine half Vatika Oil, a small amount of JBCO, and the rest of the oils on this list together. Hey, it's the best of all worlds, and they greatly seal in moisture!

**Attention Budgetnistas:** You do not need to purchase and combine all the oils listed here! I recommend at least picking up Coconut or Vatika Oil either from My Curly Mane or from your local Cash and Carry. If you'd like to add another oil to Vatika/Coconut Oil, I recommend purchasing Almond Oil.

I apply oils/my oil mix to my hair each day—regardless if I'm wearing my hair naturally curly or straight—and add them to my scalp in the winter. You can both feel and see the difference. Try it and see!

# Shrinkage & Stretching

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The tension method aka tug-and-stretch method is used on my curly mane styled in a wash and go.

“Frustration, although quite painful at times, is a very positive and essential part of success.”

~Bo Bennett

If you’ve gotten this far. Cheers! You’re almost in the home stretch ... speaking of stretching. I have a very important piece of information to share with you: What you see when you look at afro poofs, corkscrews, and waves isn’t always what you get.

You see, there’s this thing called shrinkage, and it often comes with being natural. Some ladies even experience more than a 50% loss of length when wearing their hair in its natural state. Where does it all go? Nowhere! Natural hair tends to condense itself, or as my parents put it when I was a kid, it tends to be “shrinking hair.” Some ladies have

learned to embrace this, as it helps to switch up their look. For others, this reality is a bit of a challenge.

If you're interested in stretching your hair, regardless of your reasons why, there are a couple of ways in which you can do this.

### **1. Tension method aka my tug-and-stretch method**

This technique consists of using a blowdryer and your hands to stretch your hair. To do this, begin with hair that has been washed, braided in large sections, and left to dry overnight aka a chunky braid-out.

Take small sections (combing it out first is optional) and tug each section towards the end of your hair while running a blowdryer down the length of it. Move the dryer around your section to avoid burning your hair. Do this for approximately 30 seconds or until you get the desired look. Go easy with the heat!

As you can see in the image on the previous page, I use a similar method to stretch out my wash-and-go style when it's about 95% dry. You can use this technique to stretch out just about any natural style.

### **2. Braid-outs & Twist-outs**

Start with hair that has been freshly washed and moisturized. Work with approximately eight small sections, beginning with the back of your head. For each section, seal with oil and braid three strands/twist two strands together. The smaller the braid or twist, the more defined the look.

Since it will take your hair hours to completely dry, it's advisable to leave the braids or twists in overnight. You can also wear them as a first day style. The choice is yours.



After your hair is dry, run a light oil or butter over your braids/twists to minimize frizz as you take them out. Gently unravel them. You will not only be left with a looser style, but you will also gain length. Rebraid/retwist overnight to extend your look. No heat is required. Tension stretching after unraveling your braids/twists is optional.



On the left, my curly mane in braids and banded at the root of pigtails to help with stretching my hair. On the right, my curly mane once the braids are unraveled.

### 3. **Banding**

This method consists of wrapping several rubber bands (without the metal) down the length of your hair. Begin with hair that has been washed, moisturized, and sealed with and oil/butter. Wrap your first bands gently around your root. The following bands should be approximately a half inch apart. Leave your ends free.

No heat is required.

#### 4. **African Threading**

This technique works similar to banding except you wrap a weave thread closely along the length of singularly twisted hair. The threaded sections are then joined together again in larger sections, using the weave thread. Like the previous methods, you should begin with hair that has been washed, moisturized, and sealed with an oil. Of course!

#### 5. **Pineappling**

This works best on longer, natural hair. Pineappling involves taking all of your hair and pulling it into a high ponytail at the top of your hair, so it literally looks like a pineapple. Delish! This helps to preserve one's texture when worn overnight, particularly when accompanied by a satin pillow or with the outer area of the ponytail wrapped around with a satin scarf.

Even if you sleep a little wild (guilty again!), the underside of your hair may be frizzy, but the inner/top of your hair should remain stylized. Just smooth oil over your hair to help reshape it, so it can hang a bit more downwards.

I really like the lift and fullness that this technique creates. Not to mention that it also helps to stretch hair. Each day that I pineapple my hair, I'm left with hair that looks a bit longer than before. To give your hair added length, use the tension method in the morning when taking down your pineapple. Of course, the use of heat is optional.

# Basic Styles

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My curly mane in a wash and go style.

“I will respect my hair in all its states, even if this style proves to be unsuccessful. I will remain patient and pay attention to its needs, but most importantly, I will continue to love my curly mane.”

One of the best things about having natural hair is the versatility it gives you. While there are always new, unique styles on the horizon, I’ve listed a few classic ’dos below. Details on these styles are available at [MyCurlyMane.com](http://MyCurlyMane.com).

## 1. Wash and Go

Ah, the legendary wash and go. You’ll hear this style regarded as either simple or complicated to master. Truth be told. It depends on your hair. Some tresses

thrive from wash and go styles, while others succumb to breakage and knots during the detangling process.

To capture this look, wash your hair and follow the usual steps. You should know them by now: moisturize with a leave-in conditioner and seal your hair with an oil or butter. Apply styling products (optional). Leave your hair to air dry.

However, I like to blow dry my hair and then use the tension method when it is about 95% dry.

Remember, this style isn't for everyone. If your hair is losing moisture and/or breaking as a result of this, try a different hairdo, particularly protective styles.

## 2. Protective Styles

Protective styles are true to their name. They help keep strands and delicate ends protected all day and at night, keeping it from wear and tear. This often results in length retention. Styles within this category include: braids, twists, and buns.

## 3. Braid-out/Twist-out

For braid-outs, take three strands per section and braid together your freshly washed hair. This will look a bit like basket weaving. Let the braids dry, preferably overnight. Take them out to reveal loose waves. For twists, intertwine two strands of hair per section. Let your damp hair dry in its twisted form. Once undone, your hair will take on a looser, curly texture. Remember, the smaller the twist or braid, the more defined the look.

**For tutorials on these natural hair styles and information on stylers, tune into [MyCurlyMane's YouTube channel](#).**

#### 4. **High or Low Buns**

Whether you leave it messy or neat, buns remain classic. Take your natural hair and pull it into a ponytail on top of or at the base of your head. Wrap your hair into a bun or knot, depending on your length. I recommend creating a sock bun out of an old sock or purchasing a hair donut to attain a perfectly formed bun.

#### 5. **Bantu Knots & Knot-outs**

As a kid, this was my favorite style. I always begged my mom to style my hair in this popular Jamaican 'do. I just loved it! For a visual, think of Jada Pinkett Smith's hair in *The Matrix*. Kinda edgy but cool.

Work with damp sections of your hair. Twist each section before winding it down into a mini bun or knot. Tuck your ends into the bottom of the knot. Use bobby pins the help secure your knots as needed. When unraveled, you'll get sexy spirals



My curly mane straightened.

# Why You Need To Chronicle Your Curls

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My curly mane in May 2012, November 2012, and March 2013.

You've done the big chop or transitioned into having natural hair. Now what? Aside from picking up your essentials, there is one thing you should immediately do—pull out your camera and strike your best pose. It's time to document your hair!

If you've read [my hair story](#), you'll know that I grew out my heat damaged strands a few years ago. In doing so, I placed myself on a no flat iron diet (my curls were scrawny enough!) and cut off several inches of damaged ends. I also spent a lot of time looking at my curly mane. No, it wasn't a "fairest of them all" moment. I was adjusting to seeing myself without straight tresses and analyzing my curls. I could see the front and sides, but I couldn't see the back of my head. Plus, I wanted to see my hair as other people saw it, so I picked up a camera.

Documenting your hair journey through photos or videos is one of the most important things that you can do. It can help you to:

1. **Remember the products that worked for you.** I hope that you don't go down the deep, dark path that is product junkism (guilty, hangs head in shame). Should you make that wrong turn, your photos will help you to know which products are winners and which can join the collection under your bathroom sink.

2. **Nail down a routine.** As you try new styles and products, you may lose track of what's actually working for you. Your photos/video will serve as a guide towards establishing healthy hair habits and lock down the right products and techniques for you.



3. **Obtain a true view.** It's one thing to look in a mirror and completely another to see your hair on camera and/or animated on film. With a record, you'll know how your curls stack up against itself through different seasons and over periods of time.

4. **Monitor health and identify setbacks.** I used to spend several, consecutive months straightening my hair ... Yes, I relapsed a bit (guilty, hangs head in shame ... again). As a result, I had to trim a few inches of split and knotted ends. By looking at my pics, I can see how excessive straightening dried out my hair and prevented me from gaining my desired length. I can also adjust my routine as needed.

5. **Stay motivated.** If it weren't for taking photos, I would believe that my hair hasn't progressed much over the past 3 years. Fortunately, My Curly Mane has forced me to revisit my collection of images. Gone are the highlights I once had

(When did they grow out?), and hello length! For the longest time, I've been doing the dance between feeling as if my hair was growing (I'm on a quest for length) and completely writing it off as stubbornly fixed at one length. Seeing these improvements, I know how far I've come and how close I can be to my hair goal—waist length tresses (crossing fingers)!

With commuting, work, family, school, and hopefully play, our lives are full. You may believe that this leaves little room for photo shoots. I completely understand. Please understand that you don't need to devote a lot of time to this, especially if you are taking photos for your own safekeeping.

When trying a new product or 'do, take a quick snap or two from your camera/camera phone. That's all you need. You don't even need to face the camera, as the focus is on your hair ... unless you want to ham it up, of course!

Capture the moment now and reflect on them later. Who knows, like our fave bloggers and vloggers, your documentary may inspire someone else. At the very least, it will allow you to monitor the evolution of your curly mane.



# Careful Considerations

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## BREAKAGE

If your strands are missing a bulb, this is typically hair that has bid adieu because of breakage. Eeek! These strands, which are typically shorter in length, are damaged by a variety of reasons. They include:

1. **Heat** – Ah, the gift and the curse. While I like to use blow dryers to speed up my styling time, please refrain from blow *frying* your hair to death. This includes burning your hair with flat irons and pressing combs.
2. **Harsh Chemicals/Perms** – Our hair is very delicate and prone to breakage from anything that loosens up the follicles. Hair color and lye, the active ingredient in relaxers, can be dangerous culprits. According to

LIVESTRONG.COM, “Lye, or sodium hydroxide, penetrates the hair shaft and breaks down some of its structure, effectively loosening its natural curl. Thus, chemical relaxers’ real function is to damage your hair and make it weaker. This process can’t be reversed.” Yikes!

3. **Tight Ponytails and Braids** – Yes, they’re cute when done right. However, when styled too tightly (and you can see skin pulling at your crown), you’ve done did it now! Your hair can be literally pulled and tugged from the roots or become broken.
4. **Roughing It Up** – If you’re a curlie who thinks thrashing and hacking her hair with a comb and brush will tame it, stop right there! This excessively harsh treatment will cause your hair to break.
5. **Over Moisturizing** – Remember, as mentioned above, too much moisture can actually be a bad thing.
6. **Too Much Protein** – This can cause your hair to dry out due to the lack of moisture. As you should know, dry hair leads to \_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank). 😊
7. **Product Build up** – Product that piles high on our strands leave little room for the good stuff (moisture) to get into our tresses. When this happens, guess what’s the result? Seeing a theme here?

## SHEDDING

While this doesn’t get in the way of hair growing, it should be explained and distinguished from the items that do. Hairnistas say that everyone’s hair grows at different rates, and the average rate is a half inch per month. They also say that you’ll lose about 100 shed hairs per day.

How do you know what are shed hairs? They're the strands with the white bulbs at the end. These bulbs literally come out of the root, as the hair reaches the end of its days. There is nothing to worry about unless shedding is excessive aka you've created a carpet made of hair! If you do experience extra shedding, you may want to see a doctor/dermatologist about whether this is linked to an illness or an imbalance in hormones and/or stress.

## SPLIT ENDS

When your ends fray, there is little to no solution to fixing it. There are products that claim to moisturize those older ends to prevent the split from worsening. You can also moisturize your ends to prevent splitting, but ultimately, split ends need to be trimmed away. Time for them to literally split!

Now that you know what damaged hair looks like and how it's caused, please pay close attention to your curly mane. Even if you're not seeking length, these tips will help your hair's health. Be kind to your curls. Mend all splits or cut them off for good, so you can positively progress in your hair journey.

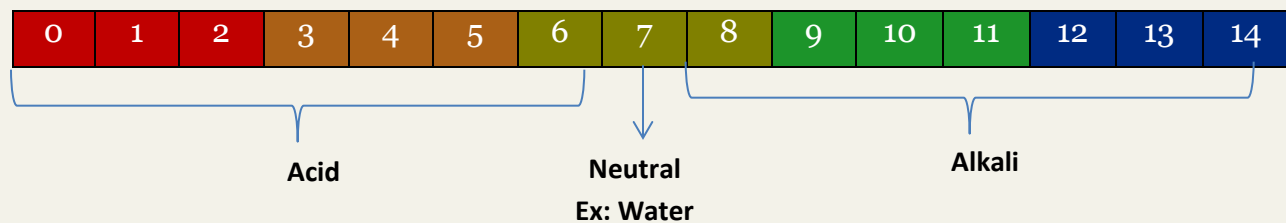
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## PH BALANCE

The cuticle layer is the outermost, shingle-like layer of hair made of keratin that protects the cortex, which provides strength, texture, and color. When closed, the cuticle seals moisture into hair, as it should.

According to Dr. Neil Persadsingh of *The Hair in Black Women*, "Soft and shiny hair depends on a smooth and even overlap of the scales on the cuticle."

The Potential of Hydrogen (pH) in the products you use can affect whether or not your cuticle layer is properly sealed. Check out the pH scale below



**Alkaline Products:** You can open the cuticle through heat or by using alkaline products (pH of 8-14). Note: Highly alkaline products open the cuticle too far open, which will make moisture leave your hair and cause breakage.

**Acidic Products:** You can close the cuticle through acidic products (pH of 4-6). These products will leave your hair soft and flexible for a longer period of time. Note: Products that are too acidic can also damage hair.

**Ideally:** Products that are pH balanced have a pH of 7. However, you want to close the cuticle by using slightly acidic products (pH of 4.5-5.5) on hair. Acidic products are similar to hair's natural moisturizer, sebum. Aloe vera juice (pH of 4) or aloe vera gel (pH of 7) works wonders since they can balance hair's pH.

You can purchase pH strips from your local beauty supply store to help you determine which products you can use for your hair. Before doing so, you'll need to determine your hair's porosity.

## POROSITY

Porosity is the measurement of your hair's ability to absorb moisture. The cuticle layer is the determinant when it comes to porosity. Remember, when the cuticle is closed, it lays flat and moisture cannot escape or enter the hair shaft.

### **Normal Porosity**

This one's easy. Hair easily retains moisture if your porosity is normal. The cuticle layer will open or close based on normal activities and products, but the actual, shingled layer is healthy and intact.

### **Low Porosity**

If your hair has low porosity, it will have trouble opening up due to its overly compact cuticle layer. With this firm barrier, your hair will have difficulty absorbing moisture/water and allowing it to escape. As a result, hair will take longer to absorb products, leaving it dry. It will also be susceptible to product build up.

Needs: A lot of moisture. To open up the cuticle, try steamers, hot oil treatments, and products that are a little more alkaline/have a higher pH level. Add moisture to your hair while it's damp, before the cuticle layer closes up again.

Need to avoid: Products and techniques that further seal the cuticle, including protein treatments, silicones, and mineral oil.

## High Porosity

If your hair has high porosity, it's a little too friendly, as the cuticle layer remains too open! It will let moisture in and out of your hair very easily, resulting in dry hair. If your hair is very porous, this is often the result of damaged cuticles through excessive direct heat or rough styling. There is no way to repair damaged hair. However, there are a couple of things that can help.

Needs: Oils, butters, apple cider vinegar rinses, cold water rinses, and protein treatments to seal the cuticle layer. Each will temporarily filling in breaks within the cuticle. Products with low pH level (like aloe vera juice) also help.

Needs to avoid: sulfates, direct heat, and harsh chemicals.

How can you determine your hair's porosity? Try the porosity test/float test.

## Porosity Test

Grab a strand(s) of hair from your comb or brush and drop it into a cup of water.

- If your hair floats, you have low porosity. The strand(s) stay at the top since it has difficulty absorbing moisture.
- If your hair quickly sinks, you have high porosity. It is taking in water fast!
- If your hair hovers somewhere in the middle, it has normal porosity.

There have been mixed feelings concerning this test. Some say that hair has oil on it, so your strand will most likely float. Others have found this to reflect how their hair behaves. Junk science?? Hmmm. It couldn't hurt to try it.

By the way, I tried this test, and my hair floated. This would mean that it has low porosity. The techniques for this hair type seem to work for me, so perhaps the test is accurate. Try it the test or any of these remedies and see if it works for you.

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## HUMECTANTS

Humectants are ingredients and/or products that promote moisture retention. Without getting too scientific, just know that these items have a chemical structure that attracts water from the atmosphere and binds it to the molecule. In other words, humectants are attracted to moisture, whether it is in your hair or in the atmosphere. They work best in moderate climates.

### **High Humidity**

When it is highly humid outside, there is a large amount of water vapor in the air. Dry and damaged hair that is free of products aka porous, thirsty tresses (see section above on porosity) will naturally seek to absorb the moisture in the air. However, taking in such a large amount will make your hair full ... to the point of swelling and lifting the cuticle layer. This will create frizzy and tangled hair.

### **Low Humidity**

Now, if you have a humectant in your thirsty tresses, this will only exasperate the problem. Your hair will become soggy, sticky, and poofy all at once! Recalling a few instances?

When the humidity is minimal, as seen on most dry, winter days, there isn't a lot of moisture in the air. If your hair is styled with a product that contains humectants, these items will either:

1. Hang onto the moisture in your hair and prevent it from evaporating. This may or may not prove to be successful. Your best bet is to stick with moisturizing products, like leave-in conditioners.
2. Remove moisture from your hair's cortex and send it into the air. Remember that thing about attraction? Your hair will do this because it so kindly believes that the air needs the moisture, of course. Unfortunately, this will also dry out your hair.

**Examples of humectants include:**

- Agave Nectar
- Aloe Vera Gel
- Fructose
- Glycerin
- Honey
- Hydrolyzed silk protein
- Panthenol



# The Final Say

Congratulations, curlie! You made it to the end. Cue the horns!

Thank you for taking the time to read through *A Curly Girl's Essentials*. Before you run off to begin playing in your hair, I've got a few quick takeaways. Consider them the Cliff's Notes of natural hair care. Ha!

- Always remember to listen to your hair.
- Embrace your natural texture, whether it is a solid afro poof, wavy, or coily.
- Before running off to grab the hottest product, get your list of essentials.
- Remember that natural hair craves moisture. Don't skip on sealing it in with oils and butters!
- Shrinkage comes with the territory, but there are ways to get around this.
- Nail down a style that works for you.
- Chronicle your curls.
- Consider other elements that are potentially affecting your hair health. This includes porosity, pH levels, and products (including humectants).

Thank you so much!

Wishing you lots of love and health to your curly mane!



*Nay*