When good hair goes bad

TIPS and TRICKS for restoring your healthy, gorgeous natural hair

nikki walton
founder of curlynikki.com
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To the curly homies everywhere, who shared my struggle and inspired me to be an advocate.

To my daughter, Gia, who inspires me; my parents, who sacrificed for me; my Gma who watches over me; my sister who keeps me grounded and my husband, the most magnificent human being to do this life thing with.

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DEAR CURLFRIENDS:

You’re here! And it’s important we acknowledge it. For some of you, this might be your first step on this journey, and for others, this might be a refresher course on something you’ve become really passionate about. Either way, it is absolutely an honor to have another opportunity to dive into the world of natural hair with you. A lot has changed in the last few years and a lot has stayed the same. We’ve gained many new naturalistas on our natural hair journey, and we’ve lost some along the way as well. But that’s life, right? I want to take some time before we jump into the fun, to give an update to the long time naturalistas and to give a brief run-down for the ladies who are newly ready to come along for the ride.

WHO WE ARE

Let’s start at the top. I am Nikki Walton of CurlyNikki.com and I run the world’s #1 natural hair care blog. I started the site in 2008 after winning a longtime personal battle that involved my self-image and the need to embrace my own natural hair. Believe it or not, how you feel about your hair can become very much tied to your self-esteem. If you’re not feeling your hair, you’re not feeling yourself. Since I began this journey almost 10 years ago, I’ve made more than a dozen television appearances, earned an NAACP Image Award nomination, nabbed best-selling author status, and created a platform from which a living community of natural-haired women has grown. That community has shaped and become part of the institution that is the natural hair movement. And none of this could be possible without you.
If you’re not yet familiar with the natural hair movement: A.) Where have you been? and B.) Get ready to be. We are a family. We’ve revolutionized hair care. We love and support one another, no exceptions. We love ourselves, no exceptions. In addition, we inspire healthy debate, we uplift one another, we encourage one another and we inspire each other to be the best versions of ourselves. It goes without saying, when you have a network of inspired women who do that, you create an unstoppable wave. Welcome to the vanguard squad I lead and the awesomeness we provide.

WHAT WE DO AND WHAT WE’VE DONE

The natural hair community provides advice. There is always something to learn from us, no matter who you are. From the newbie still transitioning, all the way up to the seasoned vet with enough luscious locs to put the Cowardly Lion* to shame, you can come to the natural hair community and find hours upon hours worth of advice to read. There are thousands of articles and discussions on new hairstyles, new products, new methods, fashion, healthy living, family, love and relationships, dealing with life and more. I know because I put most of them there. You name it, and there is someone in the community that has been through it. Get your piggy banks ready when you enter our realm honey, because everybody here has two cents to add to the pot, and it is wonderful.

What else do we do? The natural hair community provides a platform. There are a lot of voices that need to be heard, both individually and collectively. From this platform, through those voices, we created real change. We took our voices to the doorstep of mainstream media and corporate America and said “here we are, we will be recognized, we will be included.” From this platform, we told the world we were going to love ourselves and identify our beauty the way that we see fit. We made it okay to say this is my body, this is me, end of story. We told them what healthy hair was and demanded it be recognized as beautiful. It was on this platform, that some of us learned what it meant to be beautiful. Black hair care is a near billion-dollar industry and the data shows that

*That’s the David Alan Grier, “The Wiz Live” Cowardly Lion.*
natural haired women are dominating that space. Relaxer sales are down while sales of products related to styling, conditioning, protecting, treating and coloring hair are up. The industry took notice, and our hair has been reaping some fabulous rewards! What other group of women is claiming responsibility for catalyzing that change? Don’t worry, I’ll wait.

Some people might say I’m just a blogger and they’d be wrong. I’m more than just a blogger, more than an author, more than a TV personality. I’m a girl who likes to wear her hair just the way it grows. In the years that I have been a part of the natural hair community, I have made it a point to travel and explore, to bring a little of the world to the people who follow my over-shared life, and more importantly bring this platform to the voice of other less-heard individuals. We’ve met black soldiers in Japan, slum residents in India, disadvantaged residents of the West Bank, the beautifully melinated girls of Brazil and Spain, non-profit organizations and sometimes just groups of fabulous people who are helping others by simply telling their story. Not bad for a girl from Ferguson, Missouri right? These curly culture missions have shed light on parts of the world our eyes don’t often see to show us that we are not so different from our foreign counterparts. This is the community we belong to. Our natural hair community represents all different shades, ages and backgrounds - so it’s important that you’re heard.

**THAT’S COOL, BUT NOW WHAT?**

So you’re in? You’ve made it this far and want to keep rolling. You love being a part of this community. You wake up in the morning every day smelling like juices and berries and go to bed only after spending hours conditioning and detangling. You’re hitting your stride and thinking you’ve got this natural hair thang figured out and (believe me) it is precisely at that moment that something terrible will go wrong. You blew it. You can’t even leave the house. You run to the forums, call your best Curl-friend, check all the sites, and no one knows how to undo what you’ve just done. So that’s when you email me, right? But look though—embracing your natural hair and learning to care for it are two totally different
battles that often get lumped together in the same war. It’s hard to embrace it when you don’t know how to care for it and you won’t ever learn how to care for it unless you embrace it. A lot of us are somewhere in the middle and that’s what the rest of this book is about. The journey. This book is for the women who began the journey towards achieving their favorite natural look and somewhere along the road had a little (or big) hair hiccup and needed a quick ‘how-to’ on fixing major blunders. So in short, this book is for everybody. We’ve all been there. We’ve left the dye in a little too long, forgot to detangle for a few weeks (or months), ran out of conditioner so we just...stopped using it, or all of the above at the same damn time. I cannot tell you how many times a day I get emails to help fix the same issues over, and over, and over (x100). To respond to all those emails would be instant carpal tunnel syndrome and I’m pretty sure I am just one detangling session from already being there. So here it is ladies, my short and sweet guide to you to help you through those times When Good Hair Goes Bad.

Love,

Just a girl from Fort Walton, Florida,

NIKKI WALTON
WHEN *Good HAIR* GOES BAD

THERE IS NOTHING—NOTHING—WORSE THAN WHEN YOUR FORMERLY ANGELIC HAIR STARTS ACTING A DEMONIC FOOL. IN THIS SECTION, I’LL ANSWER SOME OF THE MOST COMMON QUESTIONS I GET FROM MY READERS WHEN THEIR HAIR SUDDENLY DECIDES TO GO BUCKWILD.

**MY PROMISE TO YOU**

After you finish reading this section…

» DETANGLING will no longer be a huge issue for you—even if you’re super busy.

» You’ll have figured out the best ways to go about FIXING your receding hairline.

» You’ll be convinced that CHEATING is totally fine.

**QUESTION #1: HELP, IT’S NOW TAKING ME FOREVER TO DETANGLE MY HAIR! WHAT THE CURL?!?!**

Girl, I absolutely feel your pain. There were times when I couldn’t even play Candy Crush and detangle my hair in the same day without feeling it. But detangling doesn’t have to be a four-letter word. These following fixes will get your curl dispute sorted, guaranteed.
4 SUPER GREAT WAYS TO FIX THIS “DETANGLE” YOU’VE FOUND YOURSELF IN....

1. DUST EVERY SIX TO EIGHT WEEKS WITH ACTUAL HAIR SCISSORS

Seriously, we better not see any kind of other scissors near your hair—especially not children’s safety scissors. (My friend’s daughter still confuses safety with danger to this day).

Split ends will cause your shower comb to want to give up on life between professional trims (which I suggest you get twice a year). Dusting is a great year-round solve, because it’s an easy way to keep them under control until your next appointment.

How easy? Okay, all you have to do every six to eight weeks is...

» Take a small section of your hair and twirl it around itself like you would for a comb coil or single strand twist.

» Notice any little hairs that are split, poking out from the twist? Well...

» Trim your hair right above those split ends.

» Undo the twist, then re-twist it in the opposite direction to see if there are any other split ends you might have missed.

» Repeat this process on your entire head, and voilà, you’ve got hair your shower comb can work with!

» Alternatively, you can two strand twist your hair, cutting the last 1/4 or 1/8 of an inch off of each one.
FUN (BUT SORTA MESSY) FACT

IT’S CALLED DUSTING BECAUSE WHEN YOU’RE DONE, THERE WILL BE A LIGHT “DUSTING” OF HAIR ON YOUR COUNTERS AND FLOOR!

DON’T FORGET: Schedule a professional trim every 4-6 months. It sounds counterintuitive, but dusting and professional trims are the best way to ensure your hair grows healthy and long! Retention is key!

2. GET YOUR HAIR BACK IN GOOD CONDITION!

You know how you sometimes get sick when you neglect healthy habits for too long and add in an extra dose of stress? Your hair goes through the same thing. When your curls start straight fighting your fingers, that often means it’s time to give them some conditioning love.

Here’s what you want to do: USE MORE CONDITIONER. I don’t care what the bottle is telling you. If you’re having trouble detangling with the prescribed amount of conditioner, use more. I know, I know. Those of us who are into luxury brands of conditioner might not be feeling that tip. Try…

» Detangling with a cheaper conditioner before finishing up with the good stuff

» Dilute your favorite conditioner with water in a separate bottle before applying it to your tangles.
YOU’LL ALSO WANT TO EITHER (OR BOTH)...

DEEP CONDITION

Listen, there is no better way to get your hair in good shape than a deep conditioning treatment at every wash session.

Regular deep conditioning will ensure that your hair is softer, more manageable, and less vulnerable to breakage and frizz.

So if you’re okay with getting out of the shower, scheduling a 15 to 45 minute deep conditioning treatment into every wash session is the way to go. And if you can deep condition with heat (under a bonnet or with a handheld steamer like Q-Redew)? Curlfriend, even better!

But, if you’re barely finding time to wash your hair, much less deep condition it, OR if you just want to make your hair really love you, try….

PRE-POOING

The nighttime is the right time to pre-poo. My number one pre-poo of choice is coconut oil because it really coats and protects your hair cuticles, but Greek yogurt or a conditioner from your product graveyard are also good choices.

Simply apply your pre-poo to dry, dirty hair and throw a clear shower cap over it. You can leave it in for about 15 to 30 minutes with good heat, like a micro heat cap or bonnet dryer OR you can hit the sack and let your pre-poo do its conditioning work overnight. Win-win for super busy curlies and hair pampering divas alike. I personally apply warmed coconut oil to my curls 20 minutes before I get into the shower to commence wash day duties.
3. CHECK YOURSELF BEFORE YOU WRECK YOURSELF AND
BY “YOURSELF” WE MEAN “YOUR HAIRSTYLE CHOICES.”

OBVIOUSLY.

TAKE A HARD LOOK AT YOUR FAVORITE HAIRSTYLE(S)
Did I ever tell you that story about the time when my favorite rod set
came back to bite me in the detangle? Well, as much as I love how fierce
I look in this style, apparently rolling my bob-length hair up to my ears
does not make for a happy detangling session.

As easy as they seem in the short-term, picked-out fros, wash-and-goes,
unmanipulated roller and rod sets and hairstyles more than two days past
their wash-by date can make for hard detangling.

So, if your hair is okay after a week of twist-and-curls, but crying like
a banshee after a wash-and-go, consider either taking that hairstyle off
your go-to list, or only wearing it when you know you’ll have more time
to spend on a detangling session.

Also, ANY style in which shed hair gets caught up and is unable to fall—
so basically any protective style—will come with some detangling issues.

So, don’t expect your post braid or extension hair not to have some clap-
back for you when you go in for the detangle.

But, all hope is not lost for those of us who prefer styles that don’t require
a lot of fuss.
NIKKI’S BUSY MOM DETANGLE STRATEGY

Listen, I would LOVE to treat my hair exactly right with weekly detangling sessions. But, between Tyrone’s basketball practice, brunch, and adulting, I’m either too tired or never have enough time. However, frazzled is so not a good look on a Curly Mom, so here’s how I detangle my hair without the luxury of time:

WHAT YOU NEED
Coconut Oil, A Super Slippery Conditioner, a Powerful Shower Stream, and my 10 fingers are the keys to my fast and successful detangling sessions.

STEP 1
I finger detangle with coconut oil before hopping into the shower to do the real work.

STEP 2
In the shower, I wet my hair and smooth in ALL the conditioner. I mean All. The. Conditioner. Like at least half the bottle. Just kidding…about kidding—because really I am so serious. **DO NOT SKIMP ON THAT CONDITIONER.**

STEP 3
I run my head under the shower stream to help activate the slip. I then let it marinate in the shower while I take care of all my other hygenics. Finally, I gently detangle under the shower stream with my fingers, using them like a comb to remove knots from ends to roots. Then I follow up with my wooden brush for any trouble spots.

Did somebody just say, “Awesome, detangled hair in less than 30 minutes?”

Damn right. That somebody is me, and since I said it, it must be true!
4. PREVENT! PREVENT! PREVENT!

HEY BOO-BOO, TRY THESE TWO THINGS TO FIGHT OFF A DETANGLE BEAR BEFORE IT EVEN GETS TO YOUR CAMP-SITE...SEE WHAT I DID THERE?

NIKKI’S PREEMPTIVE “I’M SORRY, HAIR!” FORMULA

When I’ve been especially abusive to my hair (neglected it, gone too long in a protective style, etc.) I pre-apologize with a coconut oil overnight pre-poo. The next morning, I say I’m sorry with a gift of full fat Greek yogurt (let it marinate under a cap for 15 to 30 minutes). Finally, I whisper ‘baby please’ with a gentle wash and detangle session without having to hear my hair caterwaul about how it’s too late to apologize.

DETANGLE THROUGHOUT THE WEEK

Um…why are you waiting until wash day to tackle your situation—especially if you’ve been putting wash day off? Try finger detangling with your favorite oil or watered-down leave-in conditioner between re-twisting and re-braiding your favorite hairstyles to keep your hair nice and moisturized until the next wash day. Other than looking awesome, you’ll be in a better position to reason with your hair once you finally do wash it, since you JUST detangled it a few days ago (as opposed to two weeks ago—LOL! I know you so well!).

BONUS KID TIP

Getting into screaming detangle fights with your Natural Prince or Princess? Consider loose cornrows, braids or two-strand twists and always pre-poo your kid’s hair at least 30 minutes before a wash. Get in front of that fight, Curly Mom!
CHECK YO KITCHEN

GOT TO DETANGLE, BUT HAVE NO TIME TO RUN TO THE STORE? HERE ARE SOME COMMON HOUSEHOLD ITEMS YOU CAN USE TO DETANGLE IN A PINCH.

COCONUT OIL
It’s perfect for pre-poos and detangling sessions because it coats your hair cuticles and protects it from the wear and tear of washing and over-manipulation.

FULL FAT GREEK YOGURT
Yogurt is a great hair mask! It moisturizes, strengthens, detangles and even has a mild cleansing action. Plus, the probiotics are great for a healthy scalp.

Just make sure you rinse very thoroughly or your hair will smell less than appealing. I remember grabbing Boogie to smell her butt one day, like “what in the entire hell is that?” and then realized I was smelling of my own curls….

ALOE VERA
Works hard for very little money by not only smoothing the cuticle surface, but also attracting and sealing in moisture.

Nice! It also works for when you burn your ear with that flat iron you haven’t used in months….
CHECK YOUR PRODUCT GRAVEYARD

YOU MIGHT HAVE A GREAT DETANGLING PRODUCT LYING AROUND THAT’S BILLED FOR SOMETHING ELSE. CHECK YOUR PRODUCT GRAVEYARD FOR THESE INGREDIENTS:

IN ORGANIC PRODUCTS

» slippery elm
» marshmallow root
» jojoba oil
» behentrimonium methosulfate (my favorite ingredient for detangling)

IN EVERYTHING ELSE:

» the right alcohols (don’t worry these are not the drying kinds of alcohol): cetyl alcohol, cetearyl alcohol, stearyl alcohol
» amodimethicone
» behentrimonium chloride 25
QUESTION #2: MY HAIRLINE IS RECEDING. PLEASE HELP ME PRESERVE THIS NATURAL TREASURE, NIKKI!

I GET IT. BELIEVE ME, I GET IT, HONEY. HAIRLINE EROSION IS THE #1 HAIR ENVIRONMENT ISSUE FACING CURLFRIENDS TODAY. BUT ALL IS NOT (HAIR)LOSS! KNOWLEDGE IS POWER, SO LET’S GO OVER...

THE TOP 4 REASONS YOUR HAIRLINE IS RECEDING—AND WHAT YOU CAN DO ABOUT IT:

TOP DOG REASON: HAIRSTYLE CHOICES
I’m not even going to bother to put a number one on this, because you truly need to understand, Curlfriend, that THIS more than anything else is most likely why your hairline is receding.

Before you do anything, decide right now if you’re guilty of any of the following:

TOO-TIGHT STYLES
Those super-slick ponytails and puffs are bad. Too-tight braid extensions are even worse. And micro-braids? I mean, micro-braids?? Those em-effers with their traumatic put-in and take-out processes will TEAR UP your hairline.

Keep your styles loose, and think twice before going to that slick pony-puff more than once or twice a month.

Don’t use too much tension while putting in regular braids, and definitely don’t do micro-braids more than once or twice a year, tops.
HEAVY BRAIDS
Those heavy braids are sooo cute—until they snatch your hairline back a few centimeters. When deciding on braid and twist extensions, go for lighter hair (like Marley hair) and ask your stylist to make sure your hair is braided/taken up in larger sections—especially around the edges.

LACE FRONT WIGS AND/OR ANY WEAVE PUT IN WITH GLUE
Not only is glue known to cause allergic reactions like rather alarming scalp hives, but it’s also bad for both your hair and your hairline for reasons that can best be summed up as...well, remember that time you ripped that band-aid off and it hurt like hell? Curlfriend, you definitely don’t want glue anywhere near your precious hairline. It’s not only virtually guaranteed to clog and irritate your scalp, but it will also do major damage to your hair follicles, while setting you up for all sorts of nasty conditions like contact dermatitis and traction alopecia (aka edges-be-gone). If you love having your hairline at the front of your head, just leave that glue alone!

YOU’RE DEALING WITH MORE STYLE THAN YOUR REAL HAIR CAN HANDLE
This is the most upsetting reason for me personally. As a curly fangirl, believe I would love to try out various natural extension styles, but my hair is simply too fine to handle it. If your hair is breaking off, even after you get hair put in by a professional, consider that your scalp just might not be able to withstand that tension without your edges paying the price.

EXTREME DIY
Okay, listen, I love those hairstyling videos on YouTube, too. Some of these divas are throwing down with their DIY braids and extensions. And who wouldn’t want to save money by doing their own special hairstyles in the privacy of their Being Mary Jane binge watch? But…professionals are professionals for a reason. For the love of your edges, hire someone to put in your weaves and braids.
2. HYGRAL FATIGUE

Okay, here’s the part where it gets sort of confusing because remember when I was all like, “Moisturize! Moisturize! I mean, seriously, use half a bottle of conditioner to get ‘er done if you have to”? Weeeel, sometimes your hair can become too moisturized, which will lead to breakage and excessive shedding.

So, think twice before washing your hair more than once or twice a week. Hair is like a nice sweater. If you wash and/or moisturize it too much, it can become wore out with something called hygral fatigue.

Hygral Fatigue happens when the hair shaft swells in excess because of overexposure to water. This swelling causes the cuticle to lift, which leads to splitting in the hair shaft during the drying process.

But, good news! Simply extending the time between your wash days will help, which means your new goal is second and third day hair! You can avoid re-washing and conditioning your hair so soon by rocking chic updos, silk head wraps and high, messy buns.

3. ACCESSORIES TO EDGE MURDER

I THINK A LOT OF YOU ALREADY KNOW, HATS ARE NOT YOUR FRIEND WHEN IT COMES TO AVOIDING LEBRONING (WHEN YOUR HAIRLINE TAKES 4-6 STEPS BACKWARDS). SCARF UP BEFORE YOU GO FOR THAT HAT, CURLFRIEND! AND WE’VE TALKED ABOUT GLUE ALREADY. BUT HERE’S SOME OTHER STUFF TO AVOID TO KEEP YOUR HAIRLINE NICE AND WHERE IT IS.
WIGS AND WIG CAPS
I get wigs. Believe me, I get them. They’re easy and entertaining and ever-changing. How in the Tina Turner could any Curlfriend hate on wigs? Also, wigs can be a great protective style with the right education, prep work and care.

However, this has to be said: Wig caps are not good for your hairline, and wigs themselves can eventually become detrimental to your real hair, your scalp and your self-esteem. I’m not saying to stop wearing wigs altogether, I’m saying don’t wear them every single day. Don’t make that Long Hair Don’t Care look your whole identity to the point you feel you can’t leave the house without Sasha Fierce on your head. And most definitely don’t sacrifice your real hair to the Wig Goddess.

NIGHTCAPS AND SATIN BONNETS
Just about every curlfriend has grown up knowing they either need to scarf or bonnet up every night to keep their locks fine and on point. That’s actually really good advice. If you have a choice, scarf up or use a satin pillowcase. But, if you’re just all about that Betsy Ross lifestyle, please make sure your bonnet doesn’t have elastic—because that’s a hairline ruiner.

PONYTAIL HOLDERS WITH METAL AND/OR HARD HEADBANDS
Basically anything that can scratch your skin or rip paper is not your hairline’s friend.

HARSH SPRAYS AND EDGE GEL
The same things you’re using to lay down those thinning edges could very well be eroding them! Frustrating, right? But, I got you. See below for my no-gel edges strategy!
4. AGE OR PREGNANCY HORMONES OR SOMETHING ELSE

Age does play a factor in hairline loss. And as lovely and buoyant as your hair looks while you’re gestating that new life, it’s going to get horror-show real when you go to detangle after those pregnancy hormones wear off. I’ve received notes from new curly mamas who’ve pulled out palms full of shedded hair during their first detangling sessions after baby.

My number one recommendation for these issues, and also, if none of the above fixes work after three weeks of implementation, is to consult with a dermatologist. I know, I know, you’re overdue to go to your regular doctor, why would you want to consult with one who has Botox ads hanging all over her office?

I get it, but real talk: consulting a dermatologist is sometimes the only way to fix hairline and scalp problems. Conditions like Seborrheic Dermatitis and age-related balding can often only be helped with prescription meds. Also, dermatologists can recommend supplements and special things to stop hair loss and in some cases, stimulate new hair growth. Basically, they have all sorts of magical solutions that no book or blog will ever be able to give you. Just budget a little extra for that co-pay.

So, in short, if your hairline is thinning or creeping backwards…

PURGE THIS
Nightcaps with elastic, too-tight wigs, weave glue, hard headbands, too-tight braids and updos, hats without scarves underneath, harsh hairspray, edge gel, and extreme DIY YouTube Tutorials. BOOK AN APPOINTMENT with your dermatologist or hairstylist.
QUESTION #3: MY HAIR STOPPED...WORKING. IT LOOKS FLAT, LIFELESS AND SAD. WHAT HAPPENED? FIX IT, NIKKI!

Curlfriend, it’s not your hair that’s lost its kick—it’s your favorite products.

What you say?!?! But I love, love, LOVE my shampoo, conditioner, leave-in, styling mousse, etc.

Me too! But here’s something basic you’ve got to understand: Products are not HUSBANDS—they’re BOYFRIENDS.

The problem is that most of us have been raised to aim for monogamous relationships. However…

Monogamy works for relationships with humans. Sometimes it works for relationships with jobs. But Curlfriend, listen to me now: monogamy often just doesn’t work for hair.

I know, I know, that one leave-in conditioner, oil, or gel did you so nice when you first met. It made your hair soft and HUGE—you were blocking views at the movie theater and stopping traffic.

But, surely you’ve noticed that something’s just not right in the bathroom lately. The magic has gone out of your hair, and no matter how much of your favorite products you use, your hair just lies there limp and lifeless.

Can this relationship be saved?

Let’s CLARIFY and see.
BOUNCE YOUR HAIR BACK WITH
NIKKI’S 4-STEP CLARIFYING WASH

First, you’ve got to wash that product right out of your head. Your hair may simply be weighed down from frequent co-washing, gels, serums or that glob of conditioner you left in your hair last wash day ‘cause it had your curls popping. All of these can weigh your hair down and cause dull, lifeless, frizzy curls that don’t seem capable of holding your favorite styles anymore. Sometimes simply resetting your hair with a nice clarifying wash will solve your problem. So, before you do or cut anything, clarify with a low-sulfate shampoo.

STEP ONE: CHOOSE A LOW-SULFATE CLARIFYING SHAMPOO

When choosing your low-sulfate shampoo, look for these Gentle surfactants/cleansers:

» sodium cocoyl isethionate
» disodium laureth sulfosuccinate
» sodium lauryl sulfoacetate
» sodium methyl cocoyl taurate
» cocamidopropyl betaine (least effective, but also least stripping—my fave)

SKIP any shampoos with these harsh/drying surfactants:

» sodium laureth sulfate
» sodium lauryl sulfate
» ammonium lauryl sulfate
» ammonium laureth sulfate
» sodium myreth sulfate
» saponified oils
» soap
SPECIAL NOTE FOR THE NATURALISTAS

IF YOU JUST HATE THE IDEA OF USING ANY KIND OF SHAMPOO, CLAY WASHING IS A GREAT WAY TO ORGANICALLY CLARIFY YOUR HAIR.

Slowly mix 1 to 2 parts of bentonite clay with warm water until it has a batter-like texture. Add the mixture to your hair in sections with a smoothing action. Finally, allow to set for 15 to 20 minutes before rinsing the mix out thoroughly with conditioner. And voilà, your curls will be clarified through the miracle of clay.

STEP 2: CLEANSE

For a clarification wash, DON’T just glob your shampoo on and rub it around.

DO…

» Dilute your shampoo in a dye applicator bottle.

» Section your hair and apply the diluted shampoo directly to your scalp. The applicator bottle will give you access to your scalp and allows for such awesome distribution that the length will get clean from the run off.

» Clarify wash only ONE time. that’s enough - no need to rinse and repeat like back in the day.

STEP 3: DEEP CONDITION

Once you cleanse thoroughly, deep condition with heat.
STEP 4: DECIDE

Whether or not you want to go back to your old product boos—once you clarify, your old product routine might start working just fine again.

OR

Try out a new possible boo for a few weeks. As a therapist, I can’t suggest trading your man in for a side bae in real life, but in this product life? Well, let’s just say, no single product will ever make your hair completely happy. Sometimes you may even have to try more than one at a time to get the desired effect.

Don’t be afraid to get back out there, Curlfriend and EXPERIMENT with products that have the following ingredients:

» behentrimonium chloride or behentrimonium methosulfate: great for slip and conditioning

» Polyquats 44 or 10: Products with these ingredients not only have wonderful detangling and moisturizing benefits, but also make your hair stronger and more elastic.

» Aloe Vera Gel: Awesome for styling and profiling, if it’s not already part of your product stable.
TRY THIS TO HEAL YOUR HAIRLINE:

WEEKLY CASTOR OIL SCALP MASSAGES
with the pads of your fingers have been proven to stop recession and revitalize the economy of your hairline.

CARDIO
Yes, Curlfriend, I’m totally serious. Getting your heart rate up on the regular will increase blood flow to your head, and have that hairline pumped up and ready to grow!

KEEP THAT BRUSH AWAY FROM YOUR HAIRLINE
There’s no reason to beat your baby hairs with a brush! Just say no to brushing your edges.

Ditch your styling gel and other crunch-inducing stylers. Look for soft-hold creams and moisturizers only.

Upset about frizzy edges? Try my no-gel solution to solve that hairline without damaging it. When I want a smoother look for my edges, I do this in three super easy steps…

» Secure my hair on top of my head with a no-metal scrunchy, using only my fingers (no brush or comb).

» I take a bit of shea butter, melt it between my palms and then generously apply it to my edges.

» I put a scarf on and go to bed.

That’s not hard at all, right???

In the morning, I just take off the scarf and, voila! My edges are laid: smooth and frizz-free, no damaging edge gels required.
WHAT’S NEXT
Now that you’ve got your curls back popping, you might want to switch it up and consider adding some color.

BUT, NOT BEFORE YOU READ THE NEXT SECTION, WHICH FEATURES ANSWERS TO SOME OF MY READERS’ MOST POPULAR QUESTIONS ABOUT SAFELY COLORING AND MAINTAINING THEIR NATURAL HAIR.
WHEN *Good HAIR* GOES COLOR

*IF THERE’S ONE ‘UNNATURAL’ THING EVEN SOME OF MY MOST ORGANIC CURLFRIENDS WANT, IT’S COLOR. WHETHER IT’S A RINSE THAT WILL KEEP EVERYONE GUESSING HOW OLD YOU REALLY ARE, OR A COLOR SO BOLD, A MY LITTLE PONY WOULD GET JEALOUS, I’VE GOT YOU COVERED.*

**MY PROMISE TO YOU**

After you finish reading this section…

» Gray? What Gray? You’ll be able to henna that gray right out of your hair.

» To Purple or Not to purple? You’ll have the knowledge you need to make sure a bold change won’t turn your beautiful hair into a curl graveyard.

» And you’ll know exactly how to keep your new head of colored curls bouncy and vibrant.
QUESTION #1: I WON’T REST UNTIL I CAN HAVE BLUE HAIR JUST LIKE THE COOL KIDS I SEE ON THE STREET. DEAR NIKKI, HELP ME FIND MY INNER PUNK-ROCK GIRL...WITHOUT LOSING MY CURLS.

Oh, I _over_ stand! Some girls are doing the MOST with color these days. It’s hard not to just want to jump on the bold color bandwagon or at the very least, toot a different color horn. But hit pause on that YouTube tutorial for a moment and read this before you get started!

HOME VS. SALON
The first big decision you’ll have to make is whether you want to attempt to color at home or get it done professionally. As hands-on as I am with just about every other hair situation, I recommend that anyone who wants a super-bold color change (two or more shades lighter or darker, highlights or lowlights), get herself straight to a salon.

For starters, there will be less dye wreckage in your bathroom, and quite frankly, if you botch this up at home, a salon is most likely where you’re going to end up anyway. So, even if you do decide to do this at home, it’s probably best to ask around for a good colorist (more on that later in the section), so that you’ll have a resource if worse comes to worst.

If you’re simply covering grays, looking to add more vibrancy or shine, or going a shade darker, a DIY box kit may be just what you need! Some other things to keep in mind before you decide to color your hair:

LAZY OR CRAZY BUSY?
Think twice about going with a bold color. Boldly-colored hair is WORK to maintain and care for—there’s a reason why the women you see rocking this kind of hair either have a lot of time to spare or entire hair and make-up teams. If you can’t muster the energy and/or time for a long deep conditioning session on the regular, then bold color is most likely not for you.
3 WAYS TO GET BOMB COLOR WITHOUT BLEACH

» How about coloring a few curls as opposed to your whole head? It’s super-cute and way less of a commitment. For those of you that are even less adventurous, I don’t recommend chalk, as it can be harsh and drying, but I super love simply massaging some liquid or gel cream eye shadow on a few curls to glam up my hair in a quick instant.

» Weaves, wigs, clip-ins—why commit when you can try out a new look by coloring any of these hair alternatives?

» Henna is a great natural alternative to store-bought dyes. See below for my super quick hair gloss recipe.

THE CURL YOU KNOW...
Changing your hair color with anything (even henna) is a chemical process. Not as harsh a process as chemically straightening it, of course, but a chemical process nonetheless. Therefore, changing your hair color can open you up to possible curl pattern changes, loss of elasticity and an increase in your hair porosity. But, if you know color is definitely what you want, read on whether you’re coloring at home or visiting a salon.

CHOOSE THE RIGHT STYLIST/COLORIST...
I’m listing this step at the top, because it’s going to solve at least half of your potential hair color issues. Look, I know your cousin watched that YouTube video like ten times, but nothing beats someone with a license to color. Speaking of which…

Your Hairstylist Might Also Not Be the Right Person for This Particular Job.
I’ll go a lot deeper into this topic in Section Three, but for now, just know there is a difference between a Stylist and a Colorist.
Both should have cosmetology licenses, but one has gone out of her way to learn about the art of coloring hair, either with an apprenticeship or from taking special classes above and beyond her cosmetology license. See why you might prefer one over the other? So, in the ideal salon situation, your hair stylist should refer you to a colorist for your hair color needs. In any case, the proof is in the pictures. If your hair stylist says she can do color but has no proof of coloring experience, consider opting for a colorist.

How do you find a good colorist? Talk to your natural friends or if you don’t have any with experience, throw the question out on social media. If crowdsourcing amongst curlies fails, ask any of your friends with color you love! Many colorists are so well-trained that they can handle all grades of hair. So if your friend is just rocking her purple hair, ask her for the name of her colorist, and call to ask if she can handle curls.

**BE A BETTER CURLFRIEND**

**FINDING GOOD STYLISTS AND COLORISTS IS ESPECIALLY HARD FOR CURLIES.**

If you find or have a great one, do us all a favor and leave a review with the pertinent keywords like curly, natural, African-American, black hair, textured, etc. Hashtag the hell out of that thing. I know you know how. I’ve seen the # paragraphs.
LET'S TALK ABOUT COLOR, BABY!

BLONDE (SERIOUSLY DON'T SKIP READING THIS)

Even if you’re not planning to go the full-on Beyoncé route, you need to know about this color since lightening is at the base of every bold color change. If your hair is naturally black or dark brown to begin with and you want to go, say, blue, then you’ll have to lighten it first. For this reason lightening your hair to go blonde is kind of the best route if you want that real head-turning color. But lightening your hair is also the worst. If done improperly, it will completely fry your hair. And this, of all the color processes is most likely to change your curl pattern.

That all warned, if you do decide to go blonde, it’s super-important that the lightening step is its own individual process. Do your best to avoid any coloring product that claims to both lighten and color at the same time.

RED

PROs: Great. Not Harsh. Good way to make a noticeable change.
CONs: Can go brassy and leave you looking like a penny. Also, the color gets all over everything. Seriously, your shower will look like Norman Bates has paid a visit after that first post-dye wash.

BLACK

PROS: Closest to many curlies’ natural hair color. Easiest of all the colors to get your hair to take.
CONS: As close to your natural color as it is, jet black can look shockingly unnatural. In a few cases, the color will actually age you up, in an unattractive Ronald Reagan like way.

BROWN

PROS: Brown is kind of perfect. It gives your hair a nice little lift, and looks great on nearly every shade of skin.
CONS: Ask your multiracial curlfriends, brown can serve up ‘dull’ and ‘dry’ with the quickness. You have to keep your everyday moisture game tight if you want to go brown.
I heart coconut oil. And even though my hair only likes it on wash day (as a pre-poo), I use it for pretty much everything else: I use it as a part of my all-natural toothpaste, I use it in my smoothies, I use it to fry eggs, I use it under my eyes to prevent wrinkles, I use it on my cuticles to make them great, I use it to remove the makeup I wear once a year, I use it to lubricate my skin (and other situations!)… I use coconut oil on my whole life and I’m better for it, so needless to say I wasn’t surprised when I learned that curlies around the interwebs are using it in their lightening regimens. Science says that coconut oil is a natural chelating agent—meaning it reduces the damaging iron and copper produced by the chemical reaction which happens when you use peroxide/bleach on your hair. And just like coconut oil’s cuticle penetrative properties help stave off the aforementioned hygral fatigue (from excess washing), it also coats your strands and scalp, protecting them from the damage. This may reduce the scalp and skin irritation, helping the color process faster and more evenly and leave your hair soft, vibrant and feeling healthier.

After the Bleaching Incident of Nineteen Hundred and Ninety-Five, I don’t bleach. I’m not about that life. But, this is how my readers are using coconut oil to help ease the lightening process:

» Saturate your hair with unrefined, organic coconut oil (like you would for a pre-poo). Secure your oil-laden tresses with a plastic baggy (to protect the pillows) and maybe throw a satin scarf on top of it, to up your sexy factor.

» Hit the sack. Dream lovely dreams.

» Wake up and proceed with your lightening regimen (with the coconut oil still in your hair.)

» Enjoy better, softer, more consistent color results.

» This is anecdotal y’all, so as with everything in life, do your own research and proceed with caution!
Okay, you’ve decided whether you’re going to go to a salon or stay at the crib and what color you want to put on your locks. You’re ready to do this, right? Nerp, not quite yet. Before you head out to the salon or push play on that YouTube tutorial, you have to…

**GET RIGHT WITH YOUR LOCKS BEFORE YOU COLOR**

Damaged hair can take color unevenly, which will lead to a poor result and increased porosity (more about Porosity in Section Five). So, make sure to get your hair as strong as possible before adding color. A Hydrolyzed Protein Treatment will create a barrier around your hair’s follicles and harden the cuticle layer, which will help keep your hair’s porosity in check and your locks protected during the color processing.

**PICK THE RIGHT HYDROLYZED PROTEIN TREATMENT**

Look for the following ingredients when you go to buy your protein treatment at the store: Hydrolyzed proteins, collagen (awesome for hair elasticity), keratin (strengthens hair), wheat protein (retains moisture), soy protein (attracts moisture), and silk protein (softens).

Simply follow the instructions for any Hydrolyzed Protein Treatment you choose. For folks with heavy damage and breakage, look for a treatment that says ‘Reconstructor’ on the label. Then, after your treatment, deep condition with heat.

**ASKED AND ANSWERED**

**Q: CAN I USE MY KITCHEN TO WHIP UP AN AT-HOME PROTEIN TREATMENT? I HAVE A GREAT RECIPE FOR AN EGGS AND MAYONNAISE ONE.**

**A: In a word: Nope. The protein in popular egg and mayonnaise treatments has amino acids that are simply too large to fit into your hair shaft for proper bonding. You really want a product with hydrolyzed proteins, which have amino acids small enough to bond with and strengthen your hair.**
NOW YOUR HAIR IS NICE AND READY FOR COLOR* *(You’re welcome) 

*One more friendly reminder BEFORE you color.

If you do decide to color with a store-bought product, here’s a list of ingredients to avoid:

» PPD—found mostly in dark colors. Can potentially lead to health issues when mixed with hydrogen peroxide. Speaking of which…

» Hydrogen Peroxide—used to strip hair of its natural color, it can make hair brittle and lusterless.

» Ammonia—opens up the hair cuticles so that color can better penetrate the shaft, but it may also irritate your lungs. Many treatments on the market today contain ‘low ammonia’.

» Here are four more possible irritants and allergens to look for…DMDM Hydantoin, Parabens, Lead Acetate, Resorcinol.

QUESTION #2: BLACK DOESN’T CRACK, BUT THIS GRAY HAIR IS TELLING EVERYONE MY REAL AGE! WHAT CAN I DO TO SHUT IT UP, NIKKI?

SNITCHES GET STITCHES: THE TOP THREE WAYS TO SILENCE YOUR GRAY

1. HIT THE HAIR SALON....

If I sound like a broken record that’s because almost nothing in a book or on YouTube is going to beat a professional who’s actually gone to school to learn how to safely color your hair. Getting the gray out is the number one specialty of colorists all over the world. If you must color at home...
Semi-permanent color—an overly-complicated way of saying temporary color. This kind of color is usually sold as a “rinse” and simply puts a layer of color on top of your hair cuticle. If you don’t love it, no worries, it fades and eventually washes out with 6 to 8 shampoos.

Demi-permanent color—unlike semi-permanent color, demi-permanent color uses a low-volume developer to lift the cuticle and deposit color. Because of this, the results last for up to 24 shampoos! This is an excellent option for enhancing your natural color and refreshing your hue. Plus, it may help to preserve your natural texture and curl pattern. It contains no ammonia and does not lighten the hair.

Permanent color—isn’t exactly permanent per se (lasts for months), so much as it gets into the hair cuticle and alters the proteins that give your hair its natural color and is ideal for covering grays. If you’re looking to go lighter, this is a less-damaging option than bleach.

If you’re coloring at home without the help of a professional, we definitely suggest going with a rinse the first time and working your way up from there!
2. HENNA

Henna is a great option for naturalistas who want to keep it real—but not too real (40 might be the new 30, but that gray hair just won’t let you get your groove back).

Henna has all sorts of amazing properties: It not only gently colors your hair, it also strengthens it and makes your curls less prone to breakage. I use henna on my own gray hair situation and I seriously cannot say enough good things about it. When new grays come in or my roots show, I simply apply a treatment, and after a couple of days, it oxidizes to a nice bronzey red. After another treatment, the roots match the length-auburn.

The only drawback: You’ll need to do multiple applications the first time you henna to darken your grays to the color you want— to go from copper to auburn. It’s also important to note that since henna coats the cuticle, permanent dye jobs down the road could yield unpredictable and uneven results. If you decide you want to switch to permanent color, you’ll have to grow out your hennaed hair first.

WHAT YOU’LL NEED TO DO A PROPER HENNA TREATMENT ON GRAY HAIR

TIME: 4 HOURS (OR MORE)
PURE, BODY ART QUALITY HENNA FROM A REPUTABLE ONLINE SHOP
BOWL
WATER (NOT TAP)
GREEN OR BLACK TEA
GLOVES
HENNA TREATMENT INSTRUCTIONS

STEP 1
Mix cooled green or black tea and 100-200g of henna in a plastic container and apply the mixture to your freshly-cleansed, damp hair.

STEP 2
Put on a plastic cap and sit under a micro heat cap for four or more hours OR put on a winter beanie and go about your chores and life—do some cardio and let your body provide the heat!

STEP 3
Rinse the henna mix in your kitchen sink or in your tub directly under the faucet. Apply your favorite cheapie conditioner (a lot of it) and head for the shower. Rinse and rinse and rinse some mo’. Condition and detangle with your usual conditioner.

After applying enough henna to your grays to tint them dark, make sure to stay on top of your micro trims AND condition, condition, condition to keep your hair moisturized, elastic, and supple.

For new gray henna’ers, the key will be:

» Four-hour (or more) treatments

» Multiple applications (for darker results)

» Cleansing prior to application. Although I don’t really do this anymore, if you have a lot of grays, this step is crucial. It will remove buildup and sebum so that the henna paste can make the best contact with your roots.

» Nikki’s Busy Curl Mom Henna Gloss
SOME OF YOU ARE ASKING, “WHAT BUSY CURL MOM HAS TIME FOR A FOUR-HOUR HENNA TREATMENT EVERY MONTH?” I SO GET THAT.

I used to swear by long henna treatments, then my wonderful daughter whirlwinded my life. So, here’s my much-abbreviated Henna Gloss formula for getting rid of the grays without the time sacrifice.

WHAT YOU’LL NEED

» A protein-free cheapie conditioner
» Your favorite henna
» A plastic container
» A micro heat cap or winter beanie

INSTRUCTIONS

STEP 1
Mix conditioner and about a tablespoon to 100g of henna in a plastic container and apply the mixture to your dry hair.

STEP 2
Put on a plastic cap and sit under a micro heat cap for 45 minutes OR put on a winter beanie and move around a couple of hours (let your body provide the heat).

STEP 3
Rinse off the henna in the shower. Condition and detangle with your usual conditioner.

STEP 4
No deep conditioning treatment necessary after using this henna gloss. Just go about your fabulous business with stronger, healthier, tinted hair.
Henna is a great, natural way to make the grays go away. But, if you’re very color-specific or just don’t want to deal with henna…

3. USE A TEMPORARY RINSE (SEMI-PERMANENT COLOR)—OR EVEN A DEMI-PERMANENT COLOR KIT.
These are the gentlest of the OTC options for having to deal with a recurring hair issue that will keep on growing back.

QUESTION #3: I LOOKED SO FLY WHEN I LEFT THE SALON. BUT NOW MY HAIR IS A BIG LUSTERLESS MESS. HELP, NIKKI! HOW CAN I KEEP MY COLORED HAIR LOOKING GREAT BETWEEN SALON VISITS?

FIRST OF ALL, DO NOT EVER, EVER LEAVE THE SALON CONFUSED ABOUT WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU GET HOME. ASK YOUR STYLIST FOR TIPS ON HOW TO TAKE CARE OF YOUR HAIR.

Don’t want to set yourself up for a questionable salon product sales pitch? Simply re-phrase the question: “I’m on a budget. Can you tell me how to take care of this color with products I can find at Target?” But just in case, here’s how to keep your colored hair looking shiny and new until it’s time for your touch-up…

3 WAYS TO KEEP YOUR GORGEOUS COLORED HAIR FROM BECOMING A BIG OL’ LUSTERLESS MESS...

1. WASH AND CONDITION ON THE WEEKLY.
Wash: Hair washing is a bit loaded when it comes to colored hair, because obviously you need to wash your hair, but water can also be a stone cold color killer.
KNOW WHEN TO “LET GO” AND “LET GRAY.”

We joke about wanting to look younger—or if you’re prematurely graying like me, just your actual age.

If your hair is thinning or otherwise suffering from over manipulation, consider making the transition to gray natural hair. Again, you are not your hair. If your hair health is suffering, but you’re clinging to your processing treatments because of a perceived beauty advantage, it’s time to really reconsider how you think about beauty.

Are you willing to chase after youth at any cost, or can you embrace your beautiful age? This is why I’ve always taught women to recognize that happiness and fulfillment is an inside job. If anything ‘out there’ in the world of change (your man, your bank account, your job title, your fancy car, your beauty) can make you happy, then its absence can make you sad. We have to take responsibility for our own joy and we do that by realizing we are always divinely whole, beautiful and perfect—even if that looks like gray and thinning at this present moment.

My own mother (who was full-on gray by 30) did a long-term transition because her hair was thinning and generally unhealthy. Now her hair is thicker and healthier than it’s ever been, and she goes to a trusted stylist (Marie of Shi Salon in St. Louis, Missouri) who uses products to keep her grays silvery white.

SHE SAYS ‘FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MY LIFE, MY HAIR IS THRIVING!’

I JUST HOPE I LOOK AS FABULOUS AS SHE DOES WHEN I’M HER AGE!
SOME DO’S AND DON’TS FOR THE WASHING AND CONDITIONING OF YOUR COLORED HAIR

» DO wait at least two days after you color to wash your hair.
» DO buy a mild, color-treated shampoo and conditioner. Just look on the bottle for the special color-treated version of your favorite shampoos and conditioners. Make sure to avoid any shampoo that specializes in getting you hair super clean—that super cleaning agent will super strip your color.
» DON’T wash your hair more than once a week. Remember, every wash fades your hair just a little bit.
» DON’T wash your hair with hot water. Hot water will fade your hair faster than fast and leave your hair looking dull and lusterless. So weird, but true—you have to wash with as cold of water as you can stand to keep your color vibrant and warm. This has the added effect of keeping your cuticle smooth, which means shiny hair!
» DO detangle as usual. Color-treated hair is a little more fragile, but can still handle this step. Use your 10 digits instead of a comb, brush or other detangling tool. If you opt for a comb, make sure it’s seamless and has no sharp or jagged areas that can snag your hair.
» DO deep condition after every wash and seal it in with an oil. Moisture is a color-treated curl’s best friend.

2. MOISTURIZE IN THE MORNING...
On your non-wash days, make sure to refresh your curls with some kind of light leave-in cream or spray.

3. AND IN THE EVENING, TOO!
At night, moisturize again and consider putting your hair in a protective style to keep that moisture locked in. Either way, if you don’t have a satin pillow, don’t even think about going to bed without some kind of headscarf or nightcap on top of your color-treated hair.
WHAT’S NEXT

So, now you know how to take care of your color-treated hair before and after your trip to the salon or your successful at home dye session.

But what if you’ve been playing with fire?

Read on for tips on what to do when good hair goes fried!
I have a love/hate relationship with heat. On one hand, it means hot links, back warmers, and straight hair whenever you want it—sometimes all at once. On the other hand, blackened burgers, grease burns, and a kajillion hair disasters (things that happen when you don’t know what you’re doing in the kitchen.)

In this section I’m going to answer some of my readers most burning questions about our most difficult friend.

**MY PROMISE TO YOU**

After you finish reading this section…

» You’ll have the knowledge you need to use heat without getting burned—literally and figuratively.

» You’ll have the tools to deal with your heat damage, without further damaging your hair.

» In an increasingly open world, you’ll figure out how to take your hair deep undercover.
QUESTION # 1: I HATE MYSELF FOR LOVING HEAT, BUT I TOTALLY ADORE BEING ABLE TO WEAR MY HAIR CURLY ONE DAY AND STRAIGHT THE NEXT. HOW DO I PLAY WITH FIRE WITHOUT GETTING BURNED?

I get it. I truly do. One of the biggest bonuses of going natural is gaining options for how to wear your hair. Curly for the concert or straight for the fundraiser gala—that’s like selling point number one in the “Become a Naturalista” brochure. Heat is how we get our Kerry Washington on without reaching for the wigs.

However, one of the biggest selling points for going natural can become one of the biggest reasons for an unintended second big chop if you’re not careful with your heat. So…

HERE’S HOW TO DO HEAT RIGHT! PUT IN THAT PREP WORK, HUNNY…

So the number one thing every curly should do before putting heat anywhere near her head is prepare it for the abuse. As I said on Dr. Oz, there is nothing you can put on your skin to prepare it for a flat-iron, but if you do your due diligence beforehand, you can avoid hair nightmares like changed texture and breakage.

So, first and foremost, ALWAYS use a silicone-based heat protectant before directing heat at your hair. Due to early century claims that silicones caused build-up and would suffocate and/or dry out your hair, many curlies still refuse to use any product with silicones in it. But, quite to the contrary, silicones coat your strands and keep heat from penetrating the cuticle layer too fast. Remember, when heat penetrates this layer too fast, small cracks form on the cuticle surface, and that’s what leads to breakage. That’s why when it comes to heat, science says silicones are a curl’s best friend.

So, before you apply heat, make sure to apply a serum or spray with hydrolyzed proteins, quats, PVP and/or silicones.
DRY LIKE A WINNER

The absolute best and least damaging way to dry your hair for straightening purposes, is with a Roller Set. Roller sets not only add automatic volume to your hair, but they also stretch and smooth your hair under a hood dryer (you could also air dry!), which means your locks spend much less time in contact with direct heat. (But make sure to take them out before you leave the house.)

THE PERFECT ROLLER SET FORMULA

WHAT YOU’LL NEED

» A hooded dryer
» Large magnetic hard rollers
» A heat protectant
» Leave-in conditioner
» Section clips (optional)

STEP 1
Wash and detangle your hair as usual (though many curlies swear by a pre-roller set clarifying wash).

STEP 2
Dry with a t-shirt or microfiber towel to cut down on drying time. The last thing you want to do before putting in a roller set is scratch up your strands’ cuticles with a rough bath towel.

STEP 3
Apply a light leave-in to your entire head of hair.
STEP 4
Section out your hair. I prefer parting my hair in four big sections (two in front and two in back). Clip the two front sections and one of the back ones.

STEP 5
Section off a piece of hair in the back to fit in one curler. Be conservative with this measurement because if there’s too much hair in the curler, it will take longer to dry, which defeats all sorts of purposes.

STEP 6
Comb the piece of hair going into the roller and spritz or massage in a heat protectant.

STEP 7
Place roller under the section and roller down and up, applying tension as you roll, so that your hair rolls up as straight as possible.

STEP 8
Repeat steps 4-8 until all four sections are handled.

STEP 9
Once you’re all rollered up, sit under the hooded dryer for at least 30 minutes.

Now your hair is ready for flat-ironing and/or styling. Or you can just wear it like this. If you’re short on time, and simply must blow dry, do so rarely and instead of reaching for the round brush, use The Tension Method: holding your hair taut in one hand and stretching it downward while you hold the dryer in the other hand, angling it down the hair shaft to stretch the hair as you dry your hair on the coolest setting. Also be sure to blot away excess moisture with a t-shirt before blow-drying to cut down on heat exposure! Never blow-dry wet hair—only damp.
NOW YOU’RE READY TO FLAT-IRON LIKE A BOSS

DO NOT RUSH a flat-iron job, and absolutely DO NOT FLAT-IRON EVERY DAY. Flat-ironing should be reserved for either wash days or even better, special occasions only. If you want to wear your hair straight every day, style with a mind toward making your flat-iron last as long as possible OR consider safely flat-ironing it once and having hair extensions put in over flat-ironing it every day.

In any case, you’ll usually know a few days ahead of time when you’ll want to straighten your hair, so make sure to set aside at least an hour to do the best, least-damaging job possible. Trust me, rushing and constantly flat-ironing will provide you with a crispy ticket to the dreaded “troll doll” effect (see the next question).

HOW TO FLAT-IRON WITHOUT GETTING BURNED

OUR FIRST PRIORITY WHEN FLAT-IRONING IS TO MINIMIZE THE HEAT DAMAGE, SO ALWAYS MAKE SURE THAT YOUR HAIR IS COMPLETELY DRY BEFORE BEGINNING THIS PROCESS AND THAT YOUR FLAT IRON IS NO MORE THAN 350 DEGREES FAHRENHEIT.

STEP 1
SPRITZ heat protectant onto your whole head of hair—otherwise you’ll forget as you go along, trust me.

STEP 2
SECTION. I’m a huge fan of working in sections because it keeps the process organized and much more efficient. Divide your hair into four big sections, and tackle one section at a time.

STEP 3
ONE SMALL PIECE AT A TIME. Section off no more than one inch of hair to be flat-ironed. Remember, you only want to run the flat iron over each piece once to minimize heat damage. It’s better to take your time and flat-iron smaller sections of hair, than to run your flat iron over a larger section of hair more than once.
DO NOT APPLY any oils or butters to your hair. This may yield a smoother result (the first time), but adding oil and butter and then flat-ironing is basically the same as throwing your curls into a frying pan. You don’t want crispy hair and you’re not making waffles or pancakes, so stay away from the oils and butters!

STEP 4
TAKE YOUR TIME and flat-iron your hair piece by small piece until you’re done. Use the chase method, where-in you ‘chase’ a fine-tooth comb with your flat iron from root to tip. This yields the straightest, sleekest results.

STEP 5
APPLY an oil, serum or finish sheen after you flat-iron to strengthen and shine up your straightened locks.

AFTERCARE

» Wrap and scarf your flat-ironed hair every night.

» Create at least two large bantu knots (I like 8-12 for added texture) every night to give your straightened hair volume and waves.

Stay away from water-based moisturizers and tight, over-manipulative, or high-maintenance styles that will add stress to your locks.

Give your hair extra conditioning love when it comes time to wash it out—post flat-iron is a great time to do a Reconstructor Treatment [see next question].
WHEN BUYING A FLAT IRON
HERE’S WHAT TO LOOK FOR

» 100% Ceramic—These flat irons last longer and are better for your hair.

» Small Plates—no more than 1.5 inches wide. You’ll need small plates to reach those curly roots.

» Ability to Change Temperature—No matter how high-end the flat iron, the single temperature ones are no bueno. Many are set at an average temperature of 400 degrees, and that’s a great way to undo all your efforts to save your hair from excess heat damage.

» Wand Curlers—Exactly like flat irons, except the end result is big, bouncy curls. The only change-up I would suggest is to use a spray-on heat protectant on each piece before you curl it around the wand.

STYLE LIKE A CHAMPION

Using heat between flat ironing sessions is a quick way to fry your hair. So straighten it once, then use heat-free styling techniques between wash days to keep your result without adding heat.

Here are some of my favorite styles for straightened hair, which also add volume and texture:

» Buns (high, low, messy, and mom)
» Goddess and Halo braids
» Bantu Knots
» Braid outs
BLOW YOUR OWN HAIR STRAIGHT BEFORE GETTING EXTENSIONS AND TRIMS, SO THAT YOU KNOW THIS STEP IS DONE AS SAFELY AS POSSIBLE. DOING THIS YOURSELF WILL SAVE YOU BOTH TIME AND HAIR DAMAGE.
QUESTION #2: OH MY GOSH, NIKKI, THE TEXTURE OF MY HAIR HAS CHANGED FROM GOING TOO HARD WITH THE FLAT IRON! NOW WHAT?

You are not alone. The structure of our hair is largely determined by the natural state of the proteins that make it up. Proteins are very sensitive to heat and when it gets too high, the proteins lose their structure and “unwind.” It’s the same reason your granny can’t leave her insulin (a protein) out of the fridge too long. It basically just comes undone.

Once, a habitually flat-ironing actress friend decided to wear her curls out for National Afro Day… only to find out that her hair had gone the way of Don King. Her roots were down for the count and the locks she’d been flat-ironing every day were pretty much fried straight.

Now, back away from the big chop scissors, and please, oh please, don’t make it even worse by trying to flat-iron your hair back into submission! You cannot ‘50 shades’ your hair. Here’s what to do when you find a troll doll where your curly afro used to be…

START RECONSTRUCTOR TREATMENTS, STAT!

The best thing you can do for your fried hair—other than swearing off the flat iron until further notice—is to commit to a Reconstructor Treatment every other wash session—at least twice a month.

A Reconstructor is an intensive protein treatment which can greatly benefit hair that has become brittle, broken and bitterly flat because of heat-styling. They not only add moisture, but also strengthen the hair follicle by penetrating the cortex of the hair, and “patching up” the damage you’ve done to your hair cuticle.
These intensive protein treatments have even been known to temporarily mend split ends until the hair grows out and/or the damaged area is cut away. Simply put, Reconstructors have become the fried hair go-to for Curlfriends from all walks of life because they have the potential to help your hair bounce back to its normal texture.

So definitely do this first before you big chop.

And along with Reconstructor Treatments, you should …

**DEEP CONDITION THE HECK OUT OF YOUR HAIR.**

**YOU WERE JUST TRYING TO LOOK YOUR CUTEST, BUT YOU DROPPED YOUR MAIN PIECE FOR A TMOT (THAT MOISTURE OVER THERE)! NOW YOUR ‘DO DEFINITELY NEEDS SOME DEW.**

Now ladies, we all know, thirst trapping those edges is not a good look. So if you want that forever love, make sure to deep condition after every wash. Here’s a super-simple but super-effective formula for giving you hair the deep conditioning love it deserves:

**DEEP CONDITIONER YOU CAN APPLY TO YOUR HAIR**

An Olive Oil + Honey + Your Favorite Deep Conditioner you can apply to your hair in sections. Leave it in for 30 minutes with a heat source and rinse!

THEN if your hair is still looking brittle and dry…

ADD a Hot Oil Treatment – [Refer back to Section One for best oils and practices]

After you’ve added both regular Reconstructor and Deep Conditioning Treatments to your Wash Day routine, the only thing left to do is…. 
**GIVE IT TIME**

In most cases, you didn’t damage your hair overnight, so you’re not going to be able to fix it with one wash. In many ways, growing out heat damage is a lot like growing out a relaxer, so patience is KEY.

On average, hair only grows 0.5–1 inches a month, and it takes some people a couple of years to grow out a relaxer. So, I recommend Reconstructor Treatments and deep conditioning along with dusting for at least five to six months before making the final decision about whether to do a big chop.

Most of all, try not to beat yourself up about this. The experience of having to grow out heat and/or dye damage is not at all uncommon in the natural community. I myself, experienced serious heat damage a decade ago and you know what? I ended up learning a lot about myself and my hair from the experience.

In fact, growing out that heat damage actually set me on the path to becoming a natural hair blogger. Now I know more about taking great care of my hair than I could have ever imagined when I first cried over the damage I’d done to it with too much flat ironing.

The key for me was frequent trims every month, so that there was never any need for a drastic haircut. I also avoided heat for quite awhile, which was how I learned to fully embrace my curls. And there was one more natural hair weapon that helped me through this tough time. Read on to discover what it was…
QUESTION #3: OKAY, WELL... HOW DO I HIDE THIS HOT MESS WHILE IT’S IN HAIR REHAB???

IN A WORLD WHERE WE SUPERWOMEN ARE EXPECTED TO LOOK PROFESSIONAL AT WORK, SHOW UP CHIC FOR SOCIAL EVENTS, AND BE READY FOR spontaneous selfies at ANY MOMENT, WE MUST NOW FIGURE OUT HOW TO NAVIGATE THAT LIFE WITHOUT LETTING EVERYBODY SEE OUR HAIR STRIFE. THIS MEANS WE MUST GO....

DEEP UNDERCOVER!!

Seriously though, once you’ve packed away your heat tools, committed to a Reconstructor and deep condition program, and scheduled trims with a stylist about every 8 to 12 weeks, the only thing left to do is to figure out what to do with your hair while it’s under heavy reconstruction.

The truth is, many of us—including me—didn’t learn to style our hair without heat until we had to in order to save it.

This need not be a wear-your-fedora-to-work-everyday situation. Besides, fedoras worn outside of movies kind of scream “I’m hiding something” if worn too often.

So, unless you’re on a secret mission, opt for hairstyles that blend your two hair textures and don’t require much manipulation. As a rule of thumb, any style that requires a ton of brushing and combing is a huge NO.

Here are a few styles that get a huge YES from curlies transitioning out of heat damage:

- Twist or Braid N Curls
TOO BUSY TO LEARN HOW TO STYLE YOUR OWN HAIR?
Consider getting natural hair or braid extensions put in by a professional. Read Section One first, and especially vet your braid technician to make sure she doesn’t put them in too tight. Some braided styles that are great for curlies going through a Reconstruction:

» Marley Twist
» Braids and Crochet Braids

Last but not least, here are a few accessory sidekicks to help you through while your hair’s undergoing its big remodel.

GET YOUR SCARF GAME ON LOCK
Now, this is the kind of YouTubing I really approve. If you don’t think you’ll have time throughout the week to style your hair, spend a weekend hour or two online and learn about different ways to wrap your hair up.

Scarves and turbans are way more versatile than hats, and can be worn to every kind of event, from work to play to fancy parties.

FAKE BUN IT ‘TIL YOU MAKE IT
Fake buns, if worn loosely and without too much brush manipulation, are a great hiding place for healing hair.
AND YOU KNOW, HATS ARE STILL OUR HIDEAWAY FRIENDS. CHIC SATIN-LINED HATS AND TRENDY FE-
DORAS WORN OVER SCARVES ARE ALWAYS IN STYLE.

In my opinion, a curly can never have too many oversized beanies. Beanies perfect for throwing on with a cute outfit and allow you to simply walk out your door without any hair fuss. This laid-back look is a great go-to for weekend brunch and it practically sings “cool and low maintenance girl” on coffee dates. When I’m on holiday in ridiculously humid destinations, beanies are my favorite accessory!
WHAT’S NEXT
Okay, so now you know what to do if you decide to keep and reconstruct your natural hair.

BUT HOW ABOUT IF YOUR HAIR STILL HASN’T BOUNCED BACK AFTER A FEW MONTHS, OR IF YOU SIMPLY WANT TO START OVER AGAIN? WE’RE ANSWERING ALL YOUR BIGGEST BIG CHOP QUESTIONS IN THE NEXT SECTION!
One of the things natural blogs like CurlyNikki.com cover almost to the point of exhaustion is big chopping. There are so many great resources out there to guide you through your first big chop, including my first book, *Better Than Good Hair*.

Sometimes the first big chop you get isn’t your last. Sometimes people chop again because they decide they just plain like shorter hair better, but more often than that, curlies chop because of damage. And in some cases, curlies chop in order to achieve a trendy new look.

Either way, here are a few answers to questions we’ve gotten about issues that arise after a second big chop or a trendy cut….

**MY PROMISE TO YOU**

After you finish reading this section…

» You’ll be ready to either REPAIR your relationship with your hairdresser or move on to another.

» You’ll have a plan for GROWING OUT YOUR HAIR post chop or shave.

» TEXTURE CHANGE handled. You’ll know how to deal when you find a 4b stranger where your full head of 3c used to be.

» You’ll have even more SUPER CUTE STYLE IDEAS for your short hair.
QUESTION #1: HELP, NIKKI! MY HAIRDRESSER MESSED UP MY HAIR! HOW DO I GET HER TO FIX THIS?!?!?

NOTHING—I MEAN NOTHING—IS WORSE THAN THINKING YOU AND YOUR HAIRDRESSER WERE ON THE SAME PAGE UNTIL THAT MIRROR TURNS AROUND. THE WHOLE TIME SHE’S TELLING YOU SHE SLAYED, AND YOU’RE THINKING $%$*& WHERE? SLAYED WHAT?

Maybe you asked Siri to “find a black beautician near me.”

Maybe you’ve been sitting in her chair for years. You would invite her to Sunday dinner, and even over for girls’ night—well, at least you did until now.

Maybe she told you she was a bomb beautician (Google boy pretends to be a doctor), but didn’t have a hair license.

In any case, here’s what you’ve got to do when you simply hate your style or cut.
WHAT BECOMES OF THE BROKEN-HEARTED? HOW TO EITHER FIX YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR HAIRDRESSER...OR MOVE ON

TREAT IT LIKE A RELATIONSHIP FROM THE START

As a licensed therapist, I can tell you that good communication is a must for every life, and I’d say that at least half of terrible mirror reveals can be traced back to poor communication. If you don’t want your relationship with your hairdresser to fall apart over a bad cut, make sure you say more than “I want a little off the sides.”

No matter how much you trust your genius hairdresser, communication is key—especially if you’re looking to try something new.

If you’re there for a trim that will help you grow out your hair, make sure to tell your stylist that before she picks up her scissors.

Also, make sure to fully fantasize out your look before you sit down in the chair. What do I mean by that? I mean you need to take the time to paint a picture for yourself and your hairdresser about what you want to achieve with your cut, and even more importantly, what maintaining it will look like to you.

» ALRIGHT: “I want to look like this picture* of Solange two albums ago…”

» WAY BETTER: “I want everyone to think I’m as cool and quirky as this picture of Solange when I walk into a room, but I don’t want to spend more than 15 minutes on my hair in the morning.”
H A I R A N D M A K E - U P T E A M
L O T S O F T I M E
B L O O D M A G I C S A C R I F I C E
NOW...KEEPING IT REAL.

WE WEREN’T ALL BLESSED WITH THE SAME SHAPED HEAD, SO WHAT FITS ON YOU LITERALLY WON’T FIT ON THE NEXT PERSON. PLUS, THERE ARE CERTAIN LOOKS THAT CAN ONLY BE ACHIEVED WITH NO LESS THAN TWO SIDES OF THIS TRIANGLE.

If you don’t even have one side of this triangle, then you’ll have to work with your stylist to achieve a look that doesn’t require anything more than what you actually have to give.

In the same vein, you don’t want to get stuck with a hairstyle that requires a Blood Magic Sacrifice to maintain.

So for the love of hair, please, take the time to talk, talk, talk with your stylist before you sit down.

Celebrities are sooooo cute. But yeah, they also tend to have hair and make-up teams. Pinterest and sites like CurlyNikki.com are your best bet for finding pictures of real-world hairstyles you can maintain without someone following you around all day and adjusting every curl.

Another thing you should fantasize about? Not liking it. What will you do if you don’t love the hairstyle or cut you asked for? I mean beyond mumbling good-bye, fake smiling and feeling resentful as you pay with a tip for a hairstyle you don’t love?

You can either take a deep breath and figure out exactly what you don’t love about it, or….

You can give it three days. Time and compliments often give a curly enough perspective to go from feeling gypped to loving her new look.
RED FLAGS
YOU MIGHT NEED TO FIND A NEW STYLIST IF...

» You tell your hairdresser what you want and she just says, “Okay,” and goes to work without giving you any plan of action. Trust, Oprah’s stylist discusses every single change with her beforehand.

» She says she can do something you’ve never asked for before (like braid extensions or coloring), but has no pictures or references of/for her work. You do not want to pay top dollar to be someone’s hair school experiment.

» You’ve never met this hair stylist before, but she sounds distracted on the phone when you make the appointment and she doesn’t ask you to come in for any kind of consultation.

» She has zero right answers when you ask her the following questions: Have you ever cut curly hair before? Do you cut curly hair dry or wet? Do you straighten with heat before you cut? The answer key, just in case you don’t already know, should be: Yes, dry*, and no.

*There are arguments for both, but many Curlies are of the strong opinion that stylists should cut your clean, moisturized and dried hair. That way they can see the shrinkage and how your curls fall. Cutting wet curls doesn’t take shrinkage (especially non-uniform shrinkage) into account. However, if you wear your hair curly and straight, cutting dry, blown-out hair is usually the route stylists take. When I micro-trim or dust, I do it on dry hair and then immediately moisturize and seal.
STAND UP FOR YOUR CURLY KID

HOW TO STAND UP FOR YOUR CHILD AT THE HAIRSTYLIST—EVEN IF YOU DON’T HAVE THE SAME HAIR TEXTURE.

Many parents lack confidence in making hair decisions when their child has a different hair texture from their own, but no matter what, you know your child better than any one else. If she wants to grow her hair curly and long, but the hairdresser wants to flat-iron it or cut it so that it will be more “manageable” for you, don’t be afraid to walk out of there with your child and find a hairdresser who won’t patronize you.

If after a couple of days, you still are in total hate with this style….

HERE’S HOW TO SOLVE A BAD HAIRCUT...

» DON’T AMBUSH your hairstylist when she’s arms deep in someone else’s curls.

» DO SCHEDULE a time to talk with your hairstylist when she’s able to give you her full attention.

» DON’T play the BLAME game. Just let her know you’re not satisfied with the cut or style.

» DO focus on the BRAINSTORM of solutions to solve this hair problem. You might want to even consider having this conversation over text message. If you have a hard time controlling your emotions during IRL conversations, do yourself and her the favor of using a device that allows you to take a breath before responding.
RED FLAGS
YOU MIGHT NEED TO FIND A NEW STYLIST IF...

» S/he tries to play the blame game even though you are not.

» S/he only comes up with one solution and seems loathe to consider any you have. Some people love and trust “genius” hairstylists who tell them exactly what to do. You have to decide if you trust your stylist enough to put up with this potentially patronizing personality trait.

» S/he can’t make the time to talk with you about this, is doing 20 million other things during the discussion or is unwilling, or unavailable to communicate at all.

If you’ve never had a problem with this stylist before, she might be able to fix the hair issue, and then you can both move on. However, if you keep on having problems with your stylist and she’s making it rain red flags consider…

MOVING ON TO A NEW HAIRSTYLIST

HOW DO YOU KNOW IF SHE’S THE ONE?

Take the time to do a consultation. A lot of Curlies are understandably short on time these days. They don’t have time to do their own hair, so why, one would think, would they want to take extra time out of their day to have definitely more than one consultation with potential hairstylists?
QUESTION #2: I SHAVED ONE SIDE OF MY HEAD LIKE A YEAR AGO, AND NOW I’M SICK OF IT. HOW DO I GROW MY HAIR OUT WITHOUT IT LOOKING COMPLETELY CRAY?

IT IS SO, VERY HARD TO LOOK AT THE LATEST STYLE AND NOT WANT TO LIVE THAT CHIC LIFE. AS VERSATILE AS NATURAL HAIR IS, IT CAN START TO FEEL A LITTLE LIKE BEING IN SAME HAIR JAIL AFTER AWHILE.

So, when you have the chance to escape into a trendy new cut, a few of us make the decision to break free from our current set up of locks.

I myself was seduced into a relationship with a side bang during a flat-ironing session a few years ago only to find out it didn’t translate well when I tried to wear my hair curly again. I’ve also gotten quite a few notes from curlies with pixie and other dramatic short cut hangovers.

But all trends must go as they come, and often we find ourselves wanting our old style back—or just the ability to wear a style other than the one we thought was so fresh when we got it. Whether you, like me, found your new style just wasn’t what you’d imagined it would be, or if you simply want to change it up again, here’s your definitive guideline…
1. Head Wrap or Head Scarf
2. Braid Out
3. Boho Braid
4. Top Knot
5. Flower Crown
6. Bantu Knots
7. Cornrows
8. High Bun
9. Braids
10. Side Twist
HOW TO GROW OUT EVERYTHING

SHAVER SIDES AND UNDERCUTS

ASSESS your personality.

Are you the kind of person who thought about getting a new style for a year before finally taking a deep breath and… surveyed all of your friends about it just to make sure… and then after a month or two of more thought, finally got that trendy cut? Do you kind of hate styling your own hair? Do you have zero time to spend with your hair in the morning? Does the thought of visiting a stylist every couple of weeks make both your heart and your wallet run cold?

Then these styles might be the right ones for you.

WEAVE OR BRAID EXTENSIONS

This book isn’t about keeping it ideal, it’s about keeping it real—as in real life. These two options are, for most Curl-ies, the absolutely easiest way to grow out a hairstyle. Just be careful about making sure you get back to the shop on time—about every 6 to 8 weeks. Damaging your hair while you’re trying to grow it out will only make the process longer.

SCARVES AND BEANIES FOR THE WIN

A scarf or beanie is a quick and easy way to cover up your new growth as you’re waiting for your hair to get long enough to cut into a uniform length or another style you can live with.
Shampoo hair with *Au Naturale Moisture L.O.C. Sham-poil* and condition with *Au Naturale Moisture L.O.C. Deep Conditioning Delight*.

2. Section hair into large diamond shaped sections.

Moisturize with *Au Naturale Moisture L.O.C.* regimen, including *Super Quench Leave-In Spray, Soak It Up Oil Cock-tail and Lock It In Sealing Cream*.

4. Apply *Au Naturale Anti-Shrinkage Easy Twist Gel N’ Butter* to sections and two strand twist hair.

5. Take twists and wrap them on themselves to create bantu knots.
TOP KNOT

1. Start with a wash and go or twist out.

2. Section out the top section of hair.

3. Apply small amount of the *Au Naturale Curl Defining Cream Glaze* to section and work through evenly.

4. Use hair tie to create a pony tail with entire section.

5. Loosely wrap ponytail around base to create top knot, use hair pins or bobby pins to secure.

6. Mist hair with *Au Naturale Anti-Shrinkage Curl Refresher Spray* to add shine and enhance curl pattern.

Take the guesswork out of caring and Styling Natural Hair: DarkandLovely.com/AuNaturale
BRAIDS

Apply *Au Naturale Length Retention Nice and Easy Braiding Custard for Protective Styles* to hair and create box braids using Natural or Synthetic hair.

1. Create a side part and clip small section of braids in front out of way for later use.

2. Create another front section by sectioning braids from tip of ear across top of head to tip of other ear.

3. Put those braids up into high ponytail and secure.

4. Loosely wrap ponytail around base to create top knot.

5. Use the previous small section that was clipped away and smooth braids around head to create side bang.

6. Tuck ends of side bang braids under the top knot to secure.

7. Take the guesswork out of caring for Protective Styles: DarkandLovely.com/AuNaturale
SIDE TWIST

1. Apply *Au Naturale Anti-Shrinkage Twist Gel N’ Butter* to hair and create medium to large two strand twists.

2. Allow hair to dry and undo twist.

3. On one side of head, create 3 small loose two strand twists working up towards crown and use bobby pin to secure.

4. Finger style rest of hair to add volume.

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Take the guesswork out of caring and Styling Natural Hair: DarkandLovely.com/AuNaturale
PART THE OTHER WAY
Creative parting isn’t just for balding men. Twisting and styling your hair so that it covers the shaved part(s) is a great way to cover your short side until it’s done growing out.

EMBRACE THE NEW GROWTH
Just so you know, there’s absolutely nothing wrong with rocking a bushier version of your shaved style until it’s long enough to catch into extensions or cut into a style you like better.

CUT IT OFF
It takes about five years for most naturals to grow a new head of curls. It might take the same amount of time for your shaved side to “catch up” to the rest of your hair. Some Curlies find it easier and a little more fun to simply start over again. It’s kind of like deciding to take the same journey twice. On one hand, you’ve already gone to this place, on the other, you now know what and how to handle all the twists and turns. In either case, if you decide to Big Chop out of your current cut, definitely stick around for the next question.

GET A LAYERED CUT
It’s easier to grow out layers than a shaved side. If your hair’s long enough, work with your stylist to come up with a newly parted cut that covers up your shaved side(s) while you’re growing it out.
You have to realize that in the long run, a consultation will actually save you both time and money. If the stylist has issues with timeliness, cleanliness, or is just not a personality match, a consultation will tell you that. Also, you can screen for potential red flags with these interview questions:

1. What kind of curly hair education or experience do you have?
2. Do you have curly hair?
3. How many curly hair clients do you have?
4. What's your process for cutting curly hair?
5. Do you have any pictures of the work you’ve done?

This also gives you a chance to screen the shop itself. I’ll tell you, I’ve been to some hole-in-the-wall shops that turn out a mean head. But there’s a difference between being a hole in the wall and unsanitary—figure out if this person’s shop crosses the line. Also, a consultation gives you a chance to get a feel for the environment. If you’re a quiet person who doesn’t like a lot of raucous laughter, you’ll want to know sooner than later if this place is basically a scene from Barbershop.

Most of all, if you don’t love the shop or the stylist, you can simply walk away without leaving any hair or money on the table. Let’s face it, some of us just were not born bold, and it’s a lot easier to walk away from a consultation with a stylist than an official appointment you made weeks ago.

**TEAMWORK, TEAMWORK!**

Can’t find a decent stylist in your town? Or does your stylist know how to do A & C, but not B? This is great time to consider splitting up your hair duties.

If you can’t find one stylist who can cut, color, and style, consider finding one who can color and another who can cut, and then styling yourself at home with all the great tutorials you can find on trustworthy sites like CurlyNikki.com.
BUT MAYBE YOU’RE THE OTHER KIND OF NATURALISTA

DO YOU LOVE TO CHANGE IT UP? DON’T MIND SOME EXTRA STYLING SESSIONS? ARE YOU WILLING TO PUT IN SOME WORK?

Then try these grow out tricks:

» Dying your shaved side(s). This is a fun way to switch things up, and by calling colorful attention to the area that’s growing out, you end up looking like a Chic Naturalista—as opposed to a regretful curly.

» Learn a bunch of new styles. This is the perfect time to get your twistout game and side ponytail game on point. Curlies also love a strategically-styled messy bun for growing just about anything out.

» Cornrow or french plait the sides. This is a super cute go-to that will need to be redone about once every 2-3 weeks. So if you haven’t learned how to French plait and/or cornrow yet, this is the perfect time to learn, or you can just go to your favorite braider to get it done. I love this zig-zag double boho braid. It’s perfect for both catching and hiding cut sides!

GROWING OUT BANGS

First of all, if you decided on bangs, that was your first mistake. But if you already did… Front braids are for goddesses… and for curlies who made a wrong turn on Scissor Lane. Braiding or flat-twisting the front of your hair is a great, super versatile way to hide your bad bang decision.
SCARVES AND HEADBANDS
These two accessories not only give you the look you were originally going for with bangs, but they also keep you looking awesome no matter where you’re at in the grow out process.

SLICK IT ALL BACK
This is a graceful style that hides a whole lot of ill-advised bang hurt. Just make sure this isn’t your only style and that you use shea butter and water on your hair instead of gel (allowing it dry and set under your satin scarf for 15-30 minutes)—otherwise your edges will be filing harassment charges against you.

DRAMA WITHOUT SCISSORS
Use bobby pins to create FAUX BANGS and position them however you like, the next time you want to live that banged-out life.

And here’s how to create a great FAUX TAPERED BOB OR CUT without picking up your hair razor: Simply put in some of your favorite creamy leave in conditioner onto a head of clean hair and create twists all over your head. Then curl up those twists, using smaller rollers on the side(s) and in the back and bigger rollers in the front and crown. Let your hair dry overnight or under a hooded dryer, and when you take it down, you’ll have a head full of tapered curls. Party in the front, and quiet cocktail mixer in the back. This style is perfect for a night out on the town!
QUESTION #3: OKAY, I BIG-CHOPPED AFTER DAMAGING MY HAIR, BUT MY NEW HAIR ISN’T GROWING IN THE SAME. IT’S A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT GRADE. WHAT THE CURL?

This is one of those frustrating things that happen—especially when your big chops are spaced years apart.

There are a number of factors that can contribute to texture changes, including…

**HORMONES**

are a huge factor when it comes to hair texture. They’re the main reason why that high school nerd returns a foot taller with a lustrous afro after a summer away. And they’re the number one reason for hair texture changes. If your hair is suddenly dry and brittle, get your thyroid checked out or…open your medicine cabinet, because…

**MEDICATIONS AND MEDICAL TREATMENTS**

like chemo can also contribute to hair texture changes. Basically, anything that messes with your hormone levels may very well result in a temporary or permanent hair texture change.

**DIET AND STRESS**

might also factor into your sudden texture loss. Your hair needs lots of lovely nutrients to grow long and strong, so if you’re eating poorly, your curls may not be getting the nutrients they need. And if you’re eating poorly because you’re stressed? Even worse. When you stress too much, your hair literally starts to shed and possibly thin. That’s why it’s best for every curly to incorporate exercise, good eating habits, and some kind of mindfulness practice into her daily lifestyle.

**GRAY HAIR**

can also contribute to texture changes. It often grows in at texture that just doesn’t match the rest of your hair.
AND LAST BUT NOT LEAST, THERE’S OUR OLD ENEMY, OVER-STYLING

IF YOU CUT YOUR HAIR OFF BECAUSE OF DAMAGE FROM RELAXERS OR DYES, THERE’S A GOOD CHANCE YOU’LL FIND YOUR CURLS ARE STILL A BIT “TRAUMATIZED” FOR A WHILE.

If your curls are dry and brittle after too much heat and/or chemical damage, no worries. Simply giving your hair a break while you pay attention to moisture retention will help it bounce back in no time.

Whatever the reason, you had to big chop. Chances are even without the texture change you’re going to look a lot different.

With that in mind…

HERE ARE WAYS TO MAKE SHORT STYLES SHINE

STYLE, STYLE PROFILE – TWISTS AND COILS
These are two great go-to styles as you grow out your hair again. Twists will give your short locks awesome texture, and coils are great for a more elegant look. Don’t simply sit and wait for your hair to get longer this time, go on YouTube and search Finger Shingling and finger coils to achieve unbelievable curl definition.

HEADGEAR
Beanies, headbands wide-brimmed hats, goddess chains, and headwraps—there are so many options out there. Find yours and pair it with a fantastic set of big earrings.
FIND THE RIGHT STUFF FOR YOUR NEW TEXTURE...

If your curls are now looser, then you’ll want to shoot for definition and tighter coils. Look for products that have the following ingredients:

» Magnesium Sulfate (tightens curls and adds bounce)
» Jojoba Oil, EVOO, Avocado Oil, and Castor Seed Oil (rebuilds and strengthens)
» Hydrolyzed Wheat Protein
» Pantheol (adds volume and body)
» Coconut Oil (our absolute favorite for hydration and shine)
» Aloe Vera (great for moisture retention)

If your curls are now tighter and you’re looking to naturally elongate your locks, try hair masks and adding olive oil to your conditioner until your hair is long enough to put in stretching styles like braids and twists.

BUT if you want to simply embrace your new tighter texture, which I highly recommend, just *keep your shorties moisturized*. Deep conditioning treatments are even more important now if you want your shorn locks to grow. Remember, heavier butter-based products with water as the first ingredient (richer products) and the oils listed above, will make your wash-n-gos shine!

Last but not least, if you big chopped for any reason other than completely wanting to, I want to encourage you to embrace your new look.

**AS JOAN JULIET BLACK ONCE SAID... “SHORT HAIR MAKES OTHERS THINK YOU HAVE GOOD BONES, DETERMINATION, AND AN AGENDA.”**

It’s true. Some—including yourself—might consider you crazy for cutting off your hair. But everyone will also believe you to be brave. So choose to be the latter whenever you can, I say. Stay open to, learn from and about, and Curlfriend, completely rock your short look.
WHAT'S NEXT

But wait, what if your hair texture isn’t just changed, but completely thinner?

READ ON FOR TIPS ON WHAT TO DO WHEN YOUR CURLS START THINNING OUT ON TOP.
A LOT OF WOMEN RUN STRAIGHT TO THE WIG SHOP WHEN THEY NOTICE THEY’RE STARTING TO THIN A BIT UP TOP BUT NOT US. WE’RE FEARLESS—AND WHEN WE’RE NOT FEELING FEARLESS, WE FAKE IT UNTIL WE MAKE IT.

In this section let’s talk about the subject we never, ever dare to bring up—not even at the most loving family reunions—thinning hair. And also porosity and weather, because why not?

MY PROMISE TO YOU

After you finish reading this section…

» You’ll know how to prevent and what to do about THINNING HAIR.

» DRY, LIFELESS HAIR will become a vague concept, somebody you used to know.

» Your hair will look great on VACATION and in any kind of WEATHER.
QUESTION #1: MY HAIR IS THINNING! WHY IS THIS HAPPENING TO ME? WHY, NIKKI, WHY?

THINNING HAIR IS ONE OF THE HARDEST HAIR SITUATIONS FOR WOMEN TO NAVIGATE, MUCH LESS TALK ABOUT. BUT FIRST THINGS FIRST, WE NEED TO MAKE SURE YOUR HAIR IS REALLY THINNING.

If you’re actually shedding and losing more hair than usual, keep on reading. If your hair has become less dense and overly fine, see my special box “Fine Hair Take Care.”

If you’re sure that you’re losing hair, you must determine if your hair is thinning or damaged. There’s a huge difference between the two.

Questions to ask yourself: Are you abusing chemicals (dyes and relaxers), heat, or over-manipulative styles? Are you super-stressed out or on a medication that might be affecting your hormone balance? Is there any chance at all that your thyroid is out of whack?

If your answer to all of the above is no, then you’ll want to do one more check. Next time you lose a hair, take a good look at it. If the hair strand is broken off in a shorter section, then it’s probably just hair damage. However, if that bad girl has a root attached—sorry to say, that could be real hair loss.

And hair loss can usually be tied to one or two factors: Genetics and Age.
IF IT’S AGE...

This is a great time to talk to your doctor about getting on a multivitamin that contains Vitamin A, C, E, and a B complex. All of these vitamins are reported to help with overall health and hair growth.

Also, talk to your doctor about Biotin and MSM. Biotin promotes cell growth, the production of fatty acids, and metabolism of fats—all of which benefit your scalp. MSM lengthens the hair growth phase—this basically means more hair kept on your head and therefore less shedding. So, if you’re looking into any kind of hair vitamin, make sure it contains these two ingredients.

However, you also need to remember that all the vitamins in the world won’t stimulate hair growth if you’re not taking care of yourself in every way. See page 112 for my Better Than Good Life Regimen, and make sure you’re covered in every area of your well-being.

LOOK AT YOUR PRODUCTS

Many Curlies swear by all-natural regimes when they’re young and rocking full heads of thick hair. Interestingly enough, thinning curlies might get the most benefit out of all natural products.

If your hair is thinning, switch your focus from styling to products that keep your hair and scalp healthy. A slicked-back bun is lovely, but a healthy, moisturized wash-n-go with well-defined curls keeps you ahead of thinning locks. So...
PRODUCTS TO AVOID
» Gels and stiff stylers
» Dyes
» Shampoos with sulfates (they strip the hair of moisture and oil)
» Oils that weigh your hair down
» Towels (microfiber or regular)
» Combing or brushing your hair when it’s dry
» Any kind of heat-styling

CHOOSE INSTEAD
» Leave-In Creams and Soft-Hold Cream Stylers
» Henna
» Lighter oils (Argan, Almond, Avocado, Grape-seed and Jojoba are my own fine hair faves)
» Air-drying your hair or using an old t-shirt
» Combing your hair when it is soaking wet with conditioner
» Pre-poos, Deep Conditioners, and Protein Treatments

KNOWING WHAT TO AVOID AND CHOOSING THE RIGHT PRODUCTS AND PRACTICES FOR YOUR THINNING HAIR WILL KEEP YOUR LOOSE CURLS WELL-DEFINED AND MOST IMPORTANT OF ALL, THERE.
STEP AWAY FROM THE WIG

Ironically, the time when many women reach for wigs and weaves is when they should most be avoided. Wigs and weaves might mask your thinning hair issues, but they also exacerbate the problem by raising the temperature on your scalp, adding tension, and opening you up to all sorts of other scalp problems like infection and certain fungi.

Understand, thinning hair not only needs to be given a break, it needs to breathe free—which it won’t be able to underneath a bunch of hair that’s not your own.

AT THE THINNING STAGE, WOMEN SHOULD FOCUS EVEN MORE ON NOT OVER MANIPULATING THEIR HAIR. SO...

AVOID THESE

» Wigs, weaves, and overly-manipulative hair-styles.

CHOOSE INSTEAD

» Wearing your hair out and low-maintenance styles like roller sets and wash-n-gos.
NATURAL REMEDIES FOR THINNING HAIR

ADDRESS THE STRESS
Women suffering from stress are the most likely to have thinning hair issues. The best thing you can do for thinning hair problems is to take care of any and all personal problems first. Make sure you’re sleeping 7+ hours a night, eating right and not abusing drugs or alcohol. Avoid crash and extreme diets, and most of all, get your relationships right. If you’ve ever thought or said the phrase “so-and-so or such-in-such makes me want to pull out my hair,” then So-and-So and/or Such-in-Such needs to either go or be dealt with. Getting your mental and physical health together is the number one thing you can do to make sure your skin, hair, and life glow.

OIL SCALP MASSAGES
Pick one of your favorite essential oils (my favorites are rosemary and coconut oils) and rub it into your entire scalp in a circular motion for five to ten minutes before you shampoo. These massages are not only great for stimulating your scalp, they’re also super soothing. Win!
**HERBAL AND TEA RINSES**

Herbal and tea rinses are GREAT for thinning hair. Many of these teas contain anti-inflammatory, anti-viral, and anti-microbial properties which will help fight off potential scalp ailments associated with thinning hair.

» Horsetail tea stimulates blood vessels in the scalp, which promotes the growth of new hair.

» Stinging nettle tea inhibits the production of DHT, the hormone responsible for both male and female pattern baldness.

» Green and Black Tea both have high caffeine content. Caffeine stimulates the hair shaft and helps it grow faster by blocking DHT.

Simply brew a pot of your favorite tea on wash day. Then cleanse, condition and detangle. Pour the cooled tea over your head, focusing on your scalp. Let it work for about two to three minutes, then hit your hair with another quick round of conditioner before rinsing it all out.
FINE HAIR CAN PRESENT A REAL PROBLEM BECAUSE IF YOU’RE NOT TAKING CARE OF IT RIGHT, IT WILL LET THE WORLD KNOW BY BECOMING BROKEN AND DAMAGED AND OVERLY FRAIL IN AN INSTANT.

As someone who struggles with naturally low-density, fine hair, I wanted to make extra sure to talk on this subject in my Dear Nikki book. If you happen to have low-density hair like me, it’s even harder, because not only is your hair super delicate, but it’s also very thin—literally it just doesn’t take up much room. So thick and bouncy hair is much harder to achieve. Harder, not impossible. Here’s how I stay achieving that glorious and thick look with fine, low density strands.

SCALP MASSAGE
The more hair you can stimulate to grow, the thicker it will look, so do this on the regular. I use a scalp massaging tool while iPhoning and Boom! Big Bawse Hair While Doing Big Bawse Things.

FRIZZ UP THOSE ROOTS
I grab large sections of my hair and hit the roots with my blow dryer and air concentrator set-up. This trick frizzes things up below just right and gives my hair lots of volume it doesn’t naturally have. If you do this trick though, don’t forget to apply some heat protectant first.
STRAIGHT SCROOGE WITH THE PRODUCT

For us fine Curlies, less product means bigger results, so if you have fine curls, use what you use, but less of it. Just make sure to give your hair lots of conditioning love on wash day, so that you can retain your moisture throughout the week without having to slather on creams.

KEEP IT AT THE RIGHT LENGTH

I have my hair cut bi-yearly and regularly do small cuts about every two months. These cuts ensure that my hair doesn’t get so long that it falls and begins to lack volume. I love to keep my hair between boob and collarbone length.

SIGNATURE TWIST-N CURL

Rolling the ends of my twists or braids gives my hair a ton of volume with the illusion of same-length bluntness. Win-win for both bulk and bounce. Also, roller sets, like rod sets are amazing for added volume and texture.
HOW OUR CURLS AGE

20’S
Strong and thick curls. Scalp produces enough sebum, which gives hair a healthy shine.

30’S
Due to a decline in sebum, hair starts to lose luster. Any damage done in your 20s really starts to show.

40’S
Hair shaft starts to shrink, making it thinner and more fragile. A decline in melanin levels means more gray.

50’S
50% of women gray by this age and follicles continue to shrink, making your hair finer and thinner.

60’S
Nearly 40% of women will have some degree of hair loss by age 60.

LAST WORDS
IN THE END, THINNING HAIR IS A NATURAL PART OF AGING. EMBRACE YOUR HAIR AT EVERY STAGE AND FOCUS MORE OF TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF THAN ON HIDING IT. AS I OFTEN SAY LOVE YOUR HAIR, BUT DO NOT LET IT DEFINE YOU. YOU DEFINE YOU. AND IF YOU’re HAPPY AND HEALTHY IN EVERY OTHER ASPECT OF YOUR LIFE, TRUST YOUR CROWN WILL BE GLORIOUS, NO MATTER YOUR AGE.
With that in mind, here’s my most important formula in the book:

NIKKI’S BETTER THAN GOOD LIFE FORMULA

MORNING:

» 1.5 liters of room temperature water first thing
» 10 minutes of yoga stretches
» 15 minutes of Meditation (some of my favorite curlies replace this step with prayer)
» 30 minutes of cardio (exercise bike or walking)
» Light breakfast (mostly fruit) with a Rainbow Light One-A-Day Multivitamin and a cup of Organic Jasmine Tea

DAILY:

» Eat delicious things (fried stuff with cheese and bacon, AND cakes, cookies and pies!) in moderation with limits on my milk and wheat intake. I don’t deprive myself of anything and I don’t buy anything that says ‘fat-free”. I eat real, whole foods and get my whole, entire life, every day! It’s all about balance.

» Read or listen to uplifting things throughout the day. It’s the only way you’ll remember to remember what’s important—your happiness. Not the fake kind, but the real, genuine kind that’s not tied to things of this world. You must make your relationship with yourself, the kingdom within, your light, your TOP priority. The dope thing is that while you’re busy enjoying the happiness that you are (despite your present circumstances), the worldly things that you enjoy (the bae, the houses, the cars), will
show up effortlessly and perfectly for you. So be about your light like nothing else matters, ‘cause it doesn’t.

» No face make-up unless I’m on TV or in another fancy situation. Just… SPF moisturizer, lipstick, and natural glow.

» A glass of wine at night. Although after my most recent trip to Brazil, I’m enjoying the occasional beer.

**WEEKLY:**

» Wash and detangle sessions with Deep Conditioner

» Lunch with a Friend or Date Night with Hubby

» 20-60 Hours of Work I Find Fulfilling (only do shit you believe in)

**YEARLY:**

» Travel somewhere I’ve never been

» Numerous overnight dates with hubby (after getting Grandma and PaPa on deck)

» 2-3 New projects that scare me

As you can see, though my current career is based around hair, both my career and hair are based around my ultimate Life. Get your Life Right and everything else—including your health, and hair will follow.
QUESTION #2: MY HAIR JUST EATS MOISTURE. NO MATTER WHAT I DO, IT NEVER SEEMS TO WANT TO SHINE! IT DRIES OUT AS SOON AS IT GETS WET. WHAT’S GOING ON?!

If your hair is eating up product and then just kind of sitting on top of your head belching without a word of thank you, chances are you’re having porosity issues.

WHAT’S POROSITY? AND WHAT DOES IT MEAN IF IT’S HIGH OR LOW?

Now, that is the real question. If you understand your hair’s porosity level, then you’re well on your way to understanding if you’ll need to do something about it in order to get back your shine.

By now you should understand that:

» Your hair has an outside layer called a cuticle.

» Being reckless with your cuticle is a no-no. Damage to this layer can be irreversible and lead to a forced chop.

Now understand this; when a liquid substance comes in contact with your hair, the cuticle opens and allows it to pass through. Your hair’s porosity level determines just how much of that substance will actually get into the hair shaft and how quickly it will penetrate.

So basically POROSITY is your hair’s ability or inability to absorb and hold water or any other penetrating molecules.
THERE ARE THREE LEVELS OF POROSITY

LOW-POROSITY HAIR
Tends to be the driest of the three types because its tightly-packed cuticle makes it difficult for liquid to enter or get fully absorbed into the hair strand. This kind of hair is basically closing itself off to conditioning love, which makes keeping it well-moisturized a job for sure.

SIGNS THAT YOUR HAIR IS LOW POROSITY

» It takes more than a minute to fully saturate your hair before you start washing it.
» It takes hours or days for your hair to dry after washing it
» Butters leave your hair oily

IF YOUR HAIR IS SHOWING SIGNS OF LOW POROSITY

» Use shampoos and conditioners high in moisture and emollients.
» Occasionally clarify your hair, since low porosity hair is prone to product build-up.
» Deep Condition with heat for 15-30 minutes once a week.
» Stick with water-based leave in conditioners with humectants like vegetable glycerin, aloe vera, and honey.
» Use light oils like argan, grapeseed, and sweet almond oil in your daily regimen.
MEDIUM-POROSITY HAIR
This hair is healthy, bouncy, and strong. It’s the absolute best, and what every curly should strive for.

Signs that your hair is medium porosity:
» None of the questions in this book apply to you and you’re already doing most of the stuff I’ve suggested, like minimizing over-manipulative styles, playing safely with color, and limiting direct heat as much as possible.
» Your hair absorbs moisture just fine and your results are usually as expected.
» Your color-treated hair is shiny and full.

IF YOU HAVE MEDIUM-POROSITY HAIR, MAKE SURE TO DO EVERY-THING IN YOUR POWER TO KEEP IT THAT WAY.

HIGH-POROSITY HAIR
This is hair with cuticle layers that are broken, missing, or hole-ridden. This type of hair is especially frustrating because it lets in too much moisture then releases it too quickly—thus that feeling that your hair is just eating moisture.

A few Curlies are genetically pre-disposed to high-porosity hair, but most often your hair becomes excessively porous when it’s been damaged by heat, color, poor product choice, or over-manipulation.
SIGNS THAT YOUR HAIR IS HIGH POROSITY:

» It becomes immediately saturated when you add water on wash day.

» Your hair dries in a matter of minutes.

» Lotions and milks fade into your hair and are never heard from again.

IF YOU HAVE HIGH-POROSITY HAIR, MAKE SURE TO...

» STOP doing to your hair whatever you’ve been doing to make its porosity levels go up.

» Make sure both your highly moisturized shampoo and conditioner has hydrolyzed protein in it.

» Do a protein treatment and deep condition every other week to close up the gaps in your cuticles.

» Use thicker water-based conditioners and moisturize hair on the daily with heavy-duty staples like vegetable glycerin or coconut, olive, and/or jojoba oils.

» Rinse with Apple Cider Vinegar and add Aloe Vera to your leave-in conditioners. Rinsing with ACV will help to flatten your cuticle and seal in moisture. And both of these ingredients with help to adjust your hair’s pH balance.

Okay, now that we’ve fully covered hair porosity, let’s move on to the next question to figure out how to get back your shine, no matter what.
QUESTION #3: HATS AND HEAT AND NO SUN—OH MY. JUST HOW DOES A CURLFRIEND KEEP HER HAIR AWESOME DURING THE WINTER MONTHS?

*Winter is when my hair looks it’s best!*... said no Curlfriend ever. Yeah, yeah, yeah, snow is pretty and all that, until your hair gets wet.

This is why some Curlies swear by protective styles during this season, tucking their hair away and not releasing it into the public until Daylight Savings Time has been turned off, but if you’re not necessarily looking to get extensions, never fear.

7 WAYS TO KEEP YOUR HAIR ON SHINE DURING THE WINTER MONTHS— BUT JUST SO YOU KNOW, WAY #7 IS THE ABSOLUTE BEST

1. PUT AWAY YOUR HUMECTANTS.
Products that include honey, glycerin, panthenol, hydrolyzed wheat protein and propylene glycol are great when you’re looking to draw moisture from the air into our thirsty strands. But products with these ingredients can go totally opposite on you during the winter months—drawing the moisture out of your hair and releasing it to dry ol’ man winter (who I’m pretty sure doesn’t have curly hair anyway). That’s why I shelve most of my favorite leave-ins and conditioners with these products during the winter months, and only allow humectants in products I rinse out—like instant conditioners and deep treatments.

2. OIL IT UP
Oil is important every month of the year, but even more so during the colder months. Here are some of my favorite oils for the winter months:
» Coconut Oil (perfect for pre-pooing and finger detangling, but might harden during the winter months. Simply scoop and warm between your hands for easier application)

» Extra Virgin Olive Oil (this natural emollient is great for promoting scalp health and deep conditioning)

» Avocado Oil (heals and prevents brittle hair with its high fatty acid count)

» Shea Butter (soothes dry and irritated scalp and leaves your strands feeling soft)

3. CLEANSE YOUR HAIR MORE OFTEN & DEEP CONDITION EVERY TIME YOU DO

When it gets cold, your natural instinct is to stretch out your wash days—don’t do that. Slathering on hair product and then not washing it out as soon as you should is a great way to Spring into damaged hair. This is also not the time to rush through the conditioning step. In fact, consider adding a super-moisturizing hair mask into your deep conditioning routine. I know bathrooms can get cold during the winter time, but it’s worth turning on the heat and doing even more luxurious deep conditioning treatments. Just remember, if your deep conditioning game is on point during these months you won’t have to chop or fix a bunch of damage in the Spring.

4. INVEST IN DEEP-CONDITIONING TOOLS WITH MILD HEAT

Tools like hooded or handheld steamers, bonnet dryers and microwavable heat caps are great ways to infuse the hair with moisture without damaging it with heat.

5. DON’T SKIP THE LEAVE-IN

Leave-in conditioners are easy to skip during the winter months, but remember they’re our first line of defense against dry and cold weather. You especially need a daily leave-in during the winter to keep your hair protected, moisturized and pretty.
6. MAKE A REFRESHER SPRAY

Simply combine water, leave-in conditioner, your favorite oil and some aloe vera juice in a spray bottle and refresh your curls with a nice light mist of moisture about every four to five hours and right before you go to bed. Your hair will thank you for the extra moisture.

Hands down, my favorite way to retain moisture during the winter months is...

7. THE LOC METHOD

This genius method was discovered by blogger Black Onyx and it has been proven time and again to provide intense moisture and definition when you need it most. Even better it is super simple to remember and do, since it’s basically...

LIQUID, OIL & CREAM

Your Liquid is usually water on wash days, but you can also spray your hair with water or refreshing spray when you need to bounce it back in between wash sessions.

Oil is your next step, so simply pick your favorite. Coconut Oil is a popular one because it penetrates the hair shaft so well, but other Curlies love Olive Oil and Jojoba Oil for this, too.

Last, but not least, a good Cream will not only moisturize, but also seal the oil and water to the hair shaft. I love raw shea butter for this step, but creamy leave-ins also come highly recommended.

This is how I keep my own hair moisturized during the winter, but other curlsies swear by reversing the last two steps. Give the LOC method a try, too, and let us know what you think!
SO THAT’S HOW TO KEEP YOUR HAIR FRESH AND BEYOND AWESOME IN THE WINTER. HOW ABOUT THE OTHER SEASONS? EACH MONTH COMES WITH ITS OWN SET OF CHALLENGES, SO READ ON TO FIND OUT HOW TO STAY FLY IN WINTER, SUMMER, SPRING, AND FALL.

SUMMERTIME
is the right time for many curlies. Not only do you get to bust out your best outfits without having to cover them up with a coat, all that Vitamin D is fantastic for your hair, health, and general outlook on life. Here are some of our best tips for the summer months.…

» Use lighter oils.
» Air-dry your hair.
» Refrigerate your leave-in (it smooths the cuticle and feels great going on).
» Don’t even bother with heat-styling (save yourself some frustration during these humid and/or dry months).
» Consider a low-viscosity hair gel that spreads easily as your primary styling tool for the summer.
» Drink lots and lot of water (if you’re dehydrated, your hair will also become dry and brittle. So drink up to prevent summer breakage).

AND MAKE SURE TO TAKE A VACATION
Vacations are the perfect time to get braids or just be carefree: Don’t hold up your vacation with lengthy styling sessions. Wear your hair loose and free, in the messiest, easiest bun or side ponytail or under dope hats. Remember, the curly who looks the most relaxed and carefree in her vacation photos wins the game of life.

Swim and Be Free!
You don’t have to be like the rest of your friends at the pool party. Now you can start packing a swimsuit and actually get into the pool (even though you might be the only one).
If you hate or can’t fit your hair under swim caps wet your hair with water and coat it in oil to prevent your hair from absorbing chlorinated or salt water. Then, after you swim, wash your hair with a clarifying shampoo and condition with a quick rinse. Don’t bother with deep conditioning, simply massage some oil to your ends and enjoy the rest of your vacation.

**FALL**
Oh, the leaves do get their pretty on in some places, but that wind will kill a curl. This season more than any other is a great time to get your braiding game on lock and employ scarves and other safe accessories like ouchless scrunchies, combs, and banana clips that will keep your hair exactly where you want it to be. Bobby pins and a good pomade are also great tools to have on hand during these months.

**SPRING**
The air is cool and crisp—but not drying. There’s a dampness in the air, but it’s not humid. Spring can be the best time of year for Curlies, but ugh! RAIN!!! This is when you want to break out your frizz-busters. Mousses and gels with polyquaterniums will keep your styles pretty even when the rain doesn’t want you to be great.

**ON HUMIDITY**
Humidity dragging down your curls? Break out the natural butters, conditioning treatments, pomades and leave-ins with humectants, which promote moisture retention by attracting water molecule out of the humid air and binding them to your hair strands. Some ingredients to look for when you’re doing your summer product shopping:

- Hydrolyzed proteins (Elastin, Collagen, Silk, and Keratin)
- Diols and Triols (Glycols, Glycerin, Erythrito, Glucose, Xylitol, and Hexanediol)
- Ethers (Isoceteth-x, Laneth-s, Steareth-x, Silicone)
- Biological Humectants (Panthenol, Sodium PCA, Hyaluronic Acid, Inositol, Glycogen)
WHAT’S NEXT
I know, I know! But what about the Curlies favorite summer and winter go-to?

HELLO, HELLO, PROTECTIVE STYLES? YOU KNOW I GOT YOU. JUST TURN THE PAGE.
WHEN Good HAIR GOES SUPERHERO

There are a myriad of reasons to guard your hair up with a protective style—and a few surprising reasons not to. In this chapter I’m going to answer some of my reader’s most common questions about becoming your own hair superhero, and I’ll talk about how to serve and protect your hair no matter the supervillian.

MY PROMISE TO YOU

After you finish reading this section…

» You’ll know the best way to go about GROWING OUT and PROTECTING your hair with extensions.

» You’ll have a few bangin’ go-to PROTECTIVE STYLES under your (satin or silk lined) hat.

» You'll know how to deal when your superhero protective style...goes to the darkside.

Hans Zimmer, cue up my superhero music, because this good hair about to get SAVED!
QUESTION #1: I’VE BEEN TRYING TO GROW THIS HAIR OUT FOREVER AND IT’S BARELY TO MY EARS. HELP ME, SUPERNIKKI, HELP ME!

Oh man, I get your frustration, Curlfriend. True, there are some naturalistas who seem to go from shawt to HAWT overnight, but there are many more whose results aren’t nearly that dramatic. In fact, it can feel stupid anti-climatic, when you don’t achieve the length you want after putting in the time. No worries, this next grow out battle is going to be different. Here’s how….

WHAT TO DO IF YOUR HAIR ISN’T HITTING ITS MILESTONES

Check in with the usual supervillains…

You know these bad guys: over-manipulation, products with hair-damaging ingredients, chemicals, environment.

I won’t go into all of this again since I’ve pretty well covered it in the last few chapters. But if you’re constantly straightening and manipulating your hair or otherwise abusing it while you “wait for it to grow out,” then there’s your culprit.

The truth is, I rarely get emails from Curlies that say, “I did everything right and deep conditioned every week for a year and my hair barely grew.” Most times simply making the switch to protective or low-manipulations styles will get your hair growing (or length retention, rather) regimen back on track.

Then you have to ask yourself…

WHAT KIND OF PROTECTIVE STYLE IS BEST FOR ME?

There are so many answers to this question, a few of which we’ll cover later in this chapter. First let’s start off with the most controversial of your protective style options….
EXTENSIONS

So many curlies have strong opinions about their hair, and strangely enough, even stronger opinions about other curlies’ hair. But if you’re your own hair hero’s journey—as opposed to say, starring in someone else’s action movie, it’s up to you and only you to decide which protective style is best for you.

If your hair is on the shorter side, braids, twists and other sorts of extensions might just be the sidekick you need to grow your hair out. Why? Because they’re long-term styles, which will keep your hair protected while it’s busy growing. Here are some of our favorite long term protective sidekicks...

KINKY TWISTS

Kinky Twists have become a super popular way to protect your hair during the winter months.

» Pros: They can last up to eight weeks. And oh my gosh, they are so low maintenance. It will probably take you longer to decide how to style your hair then to actually put it up or leave it down in the morning. Also, the bulky nature of the twists makes them kind of perfect for the winter. Like wearing a hat that keeps your head warm and goes with everything.

» Cons: Kinky Twists are very low maintenance, but they do require many hours of installation time—anywhere from six to sixteen hours depending on whether or not you choose to put them in yourself. Also, the hair is so bulky, you pretty much have two options, half up/half down or all down. So this style can get hot, heavy, boring, and not so ideal during the summer and while exercising.
MARLEY AND HAVANA TWISTS

A lighter alternative to Kinky Twists, you’ll often find these protective styles blowing up the eastern seaboard during the summer. Havana Hair is the lighter of the two, so it’s recommended to counteract hair strain. But it’s also more expensive (nearly three times as much per package as Marley Hair). And it’s way harder to get than Marley Hair. There’s a good chance you’ll have to order the extra hair online at least 1-2 weeks before your twisting appointment if you want to have Havana Twists installed.

» Pros: Both are versatile. They bun up beautifully and Marley Hair can be found in just about any beauty supply store that has extensions. Also, both Havana and Marley Hair are re-useable. And there are so many good how-to tutorials on YouTube, this is probably the easiest of the long-term protective styles to put in yourself. Ka-ching!

» Cons: These are the easiest protective styles to put in yourself, but you’re still looking at nearly a full work-day of installation time. Droop.
FAUX LOC

Locs have been embraced by rappers and academics alike. From Lil’ Wayne to Toni Morrison, there’s just something about this hairstyle that screams, “totally legit.” So is it any ironic wonder that the faux version is becoming more and more popular by the day. All the “realness” without the commitment. Yasss!

» Pros: Locs are always on-trend, and it’s easy to edge your look up by adding color with a cheap package of already dyed Marley Hair. This is a great style for anyone who not only wants to protect their hair, but also doesn’t mind getting mistaken for a member of the cool kids club. At the same time, Faux Locs can be a perfect go-to for an older curly who already has grey hair—instant gravitas and length.

» Cons: Faux Locs are so trendy you might end up having to put them in yourself. A lot of braid shops just don’t have them on their lists of services yet, but putting them in yourself takes quite a while—longer than any other style on this list. And if you use too much hair, Faux Locs get real heavy, real fast—not good for your scalp or your hairline. Also, you know how real locs can fuzz, frizz, and static cling every piece lint hanging out in your vicinity? Faux Locs have the exact same problem.
BOX BRAIDS
An enduring classic. I mean, is it even summer until you see somebody with box braids at the pool? Nay, madam, I think not.

» Pros: So classic. So easy to style however you want. And you can safely keep them in for up to 8 weeks. Of all these styles, this is the least likely to need touch ups, especially if they’re installed by a professional.

» Cons: Can get really boring, real fast. If put in too tight, they will thin out the hair they’re supposed to be protecting and decimate your hairline. And Curlfriend, people have been talking about the installation time on these bad girls since the ‘80s.

CROCHET BRAID WEAVES
Oh, this protective style is incredibly popular in the natural community—especially among curlies who want to keep both their length and their curls. Basically, you cornrow your real hair, then sew in any kind of hair you want on top of your newly rowed hair with a crochet needle. This is a crafty way to go as long and straight or as big and curly as you want.

» Pros: Looks awesome and it can be a great alternative to straightening your hair. And talk about cool—you can seriously rock out your extensions with added color or just make it big, big, big! You can also put in short styles, and shoulder length styles. Seriously, however you want your hair to look at the end of your growth journey you’re on, this is one awesome way to achieve it early. Plus, they only take a relatively short 2-3 hours to put in, and unlike with regular extensions, the takedown is super easy.

» Cons: I mean, you could technically put in this style yourself, but there’s a needle and sewing involved, so you’ll most likely have to go to the shop to get this done.
In any case, long-term protective styles can be really awesome. They not only give you whatever length you’ve been craving, but they also allow you to change up your look as wanted or needed. All while leaving you with the ability to care for your real hair while it’s hidden away. This makes long-term protective styles a great alternative for…

» The Perennially Busy

» New Naturals

» Students

» Those in the public eye (actors, musicians, on-air talent, etc.)

» Chronic Over Manipulators (this is the hair equivalent to tying your hands down)

Long-term protective styles are also great for traveling, getting you through those harsh winter months, and breezing you through brutally hot summer days. These are the kind of styles that will save you in a pinch, and give you a consistent look you can depend on in any kind of weather.

But, remember what happened in the first three Star Wars? Trust your hero style will Darth Vader in an instant if you do not maintain it properly. So here’s how to keep your post-protective style curl body count low.

**BEFORE YOU GET YOUR HAIR BRAIDED OR WEAVED**

Wash your hair yourself. You’ll want to do both a hydrolyzed protein treatment and a deep conditioning treatment with heat.

Straighten your hair yourself if necessary. Ask your braider if she needs to straighten your hair beforehand. If she says yes, take that step out of her hands. Do a protein treatment after you wash your hair. Then blow it out safely, with a heat protectant (See chapter 3 for further instructions).
WHILE YOUR HAIR IS BRAIDED OR WEAVED

Remember, a long-term protective style isn’t a get out of haircare free card. You’ve still got to protect your city, SuperCurl!

Don’t Put Your Style In Too Tight. Talk with your braider about this or remind yourself as you’re doing your own installation. How do you know your extensions are too tight? Headaches, severe scalp discomfort, and any kind of bumps or redness are all signs of a too tight installation.

Stick to your Normal Washing, Conditioning and Moisturizing schedule. Your hair still needs TLC even underneath all that hair armor. Wash and condition as usual. Also, rub both your faux and real hair down with coconut oil before scarffing up and/or sleeping on a silk pillow at night.

PARTING WAYS WITH YOUR PROTECTIVE STYLE...

Look for these 3 signs that you need to kick Robin out the bat cave sooner than planned:

» It’s time. The most important thing is not to leave any protective style in too long. If your hairstylist tells you 6 to 8 weeks, aim for seven weeks. And never, ever let any extended style stay in more than 8 weeks, lest you want your protective style to climb aboard the Death Star.

» It stops retaining moisture. Have you been spritzing and washing and DT’ing like you’re supposed to, but your hair still feels dry? Then it’s time for the extensions to come out. Remember dryness is one of the biggest supervillains in the game when it comes to growing out your hair. Dryness equals breakage, which is the exact opposite of what you want.

» It looks old, dingy, and/or raggedy. Fake hair dangling from new growth, tangled roots, matted extensions—these are all indicators that you and your protective style need to say goodbye as soon as possible.
**AFTER TAKING OUT YOUR STYLE...**

This is the time to treat your real hair extra, gentle and nice. It’s been covered up for a minute, and you should have a little extra hair energy from all the styling stuff you haven’t had to do over the last 4 to 8 weeks. So follow these steps to get your hair back in fighting shape:

1. Pre-poo with a product that contains marshmallow root for extra slip and protection. Night takedowns are the best, because then you can pre-poo and leave it in overnight.

2. Lightly detangle. At least 2 hours later or the next morning, gently detangle your hair with your fingers first, and then a wide-tooth comb. This will be “a mission”, so I suggest sectioning your hair into parts. Then use all of your patience powers to detangle with a wide-tooth comb, making sure to start at the ends and work your way to the root. Adding loads of cheap, slippery conditioner to each section will help the process go smoother.

3. Clarify like Wonder Woman on sink duty at the hair shop. If ever there’s a time to clarify, this is the one. You’ll want to use a clarifying shampoo to rid your hair of weeks of product buildup.

4. Add a protein treatment. This will not only strengthen your hair but help repair any damage the protective style has done to your “real identity.”

5. Deep Condition with heat. Did you really think I wasn’t going to advise this? I mean, really? Do you not know me by now?

Last but not least, **WAIT**.

Every superhero needs her theme music and downtime. Although common, going straight from a takedown to a new installation is **NEVER, EVER** advised. Immediate re-installations can really damage both your hair and scalp.
Moreover, the need to “not be seen without your hair” might indicate a potentially unhealthy attachment to your extensions. As the old Zen saying goes, “You should sit in meditation for 20 minutes a day, unless you’re too busy, then you sit for an hour.” If you find you can’t give your hair a few days to breathe, then you really need to give it a few weeks until you put in another extended style. You want to feel as good about yourself when you’re rocking your real hair as you do when it’s in extensions or weaves.

Worried about what to do with your hair between long-term styles? Keep reading!

**QUESTION #2: OKAY, I’M A MOM. I BARELY HAVE TIME TO DO MY DAUGHTER’S HAIR, MUCH LESS MY OWN. I AM NOT LOOKING TO SPEND MY ENTIRE LIFE INSTALLING A PROTECTIVE STYLE. SO WHAT SHOULD I DO?**

Pushing the overstand button so hard. My whole life changed 5 years ago when my daughter was born. Now I’ve gone from overnight henna treatments to 4 hour glosses. From deep treatment sessions after thoroughly cleansing to pre-pooing and hoping for the best.

We moms just don’t have the time to luxuriate like we used to, so that means coming up with super quick and/or convenient ways to maintain our fly while protecting our hair.
NIKKI’S TOP 3 SUPER EASY GROW OUT HAIRSTYLES:

TWIST AND BRAID OUTS IN FRONT OF THE TV

Let’s face it, for most of us, watching TV is a zero sum activity. This is the time of day when we’re least productive, most likely to thoughtlessly snack, and studies have shown that watching it all the way up until bedtime can seriously mess with your sleep*, but no worries, your TV time can go from zero sum to super productive in an instant if you use it to set yourself up for hair greatness.

Twist and Braid Outs are perhaps the easiest styles to do without a mirror (that’s why they’re perfect for TV time!). However, twists and braid outs do come with their share of challenges. Here are a few fixes for the most common issues with these otherwise super-easy styles.

Wet, Damp, or Dry? Figure it out. Some people are quick to put these styles into the hairstyle asylum for the criminally disappointing when they come out less than optimal. I mean who wants to install a twistout at night only to see less than stellar results when they take it out?

Don’t be so quick to lock this hairstyle up for crimes against your curls. If your dry twists turn out frizzy, trying twisting on wet hair. If that’s too flat, try twisting on damp hair. I myself like to twist on damp to dry hair. It doesn’t last as long as twisting on wet hair, but I get a fuller end result (less scalp-y). Just remember if you twist on wet hair, give it ample time to dry before taking it out, or you’ll get limp curls with lots of scalp showing.

Make sure your hair is thoroughly detangled and smooth before twisting. Nothing guarantees a frizzier turn out than just mindlessly going in. Use a paddle brush or wide toothed comb on each section prior to twisting.

*Citation: http://www.webmd.com/sleep-disorders/features/power-down-better-sleep
Don’t depend on the wrong product. If your twist out came out just meh, try switching up your products – and I do mean products. The ideal twist out employs a moisturizing product underneath a sealing butter or oil. If you only use one product to put in your twists, your curls might look dry and thirsty when you take them down, so make sure to seal them up!

Try flat-twisting your roots. This will give your twist out a more consistent pattern. Just grab the dominant strand of the section you’re planning to twist or braid. Section that section into two pieces, and twist them five to six times before grabbing the other section(s) of hair and twisting or braiding as usual.

The takedown is just as important. It’s a common situation. You leisurely put in your twists or braids at night, only to rush through the takedown. Totally understandable, but alas, a rushed takedown can undo all your thoughtful work and yield poor results. Give yourself at least thirty minutes to take out this style and remember the holy trinity of takedowns:

1. DO give yourself time to complete this step.
2. DO oil your hands to increase smoothness and decrease frizz.
3. DON’T over-manipulate your actual curls. Fluffing and separating too many of your curls will cost you definition and invite frizz along on your carefully prepared awesome hair mission. Instead concentrate on picking out your roots for a fuller result.

**TOP OF THE MORNING CROWN BRAID**

This style is beyond awesome for busy moms, because it’s ideal for any kind of hair situation. Clean and kinky, stretched out and dirty—no matter where you’re at in your hair week, this style will look beautiful. It can be worn by professionals, and translates well into any event or setting. Plus it only takes about 10 – 20 minutes to put in! So Much Win!

This style can be flat-twisted or braided in, but there are so many great tutorials online, I won’t bother with step-by-step instructions here. Just remember:
» DETANGLE first with a moisturizer and a sealing oil.

» Use a SAFE SETTING PRODUCT. Think styling puddings and butter based products—not gel.

» Don’t pull too hard on your edges while putting them in.

**CURLY KID SIDE BOX:**

Those crown braids will make your curly girl the queen of her next princess party, and they seat tiaras like a BAWSE.

**CURLFRIEND SIDENOTE**

Want an even more dramatic look, fast? Add Kanekalon hair to turn your Crown Braids into Goddess Braids! This is like the one extended protective style that goes in fast, and depending on how cute you sleep, can last anywhere from 2 to 6 weeks. *What?!!*

**BUN-BUN FOR THE WIN-WIN!**

When I myself was growing my hair out after years of straightening damage, I was stuck in a very unforgiving climate (Humid as Hades, North Carolina) and had to juggle grad school on top of a relationship with my husband. I personally had great success with deep conditioning treatments at every wash and doing roller sets that I immediately put into high, chic, messy buns or the ‘Southern Tease’ bun I shared in my first book, ‘Better Than Good Hair.’

Simply gather all the hair like you’re about to create a low pony, but instead you tuck the ends and fold them to the center of your head and then tuck the sides to meet the ends in the middle and pin. This style is
perfect for after you’ve set your hair in rollers, and bonus, it gives you extra stretch and smoother results.

Sticking to this simple routine for 6 months (being mindful of keeping your ends moisturized and sealed) will grow your hair out like none other.

As you can see, protective styles sure are great. But what happens when they turn on you? Read on to find out what to do when protective styles either damage your hair or just don’t seem to be helping it grow.

**QUESTION #3: NIKKI, I AM SO FREAKING FRUSTRATED. I’VE BEEN PROTECTIVE STYLING THE HECK OUT MY HAIR ALL WINTER AND SPRING, BUT WHEN I WENT IN TO MEASURE IT, IT WAS THE SAME DAMN LENGTH! PLUS, NOW MY HAIR LOOKS HAGGARD. WHY ISN’T MY HAIR GROWING?? WHY, NIKKI????**

I understand your frustration. Sometimes the gold at the end of the protective style rainbow is not the inches of hair we were expecting. In fact, sometimes protective styles cause more problems than they fix—problems that include tangles, dryness, and breakage.

Earlier I talked about the kind of curly who might benefit best from a protective style, now let’s dig into who might not…
THE PERENNIALLY TIME-CHALLENGED.
If you don’t have the time or energy to properly water and maintain your protective style, it could do more damage than good. Even the quickest styles should be done on thoroughly detangled hair, or else your hair is going to hate you when you take it out. Furthermore, you are simply not going to get away with poor practices like not oiling your hair at night, skipping deep conditioning treatments, and back-to-back installations.

THOSE WITH SERIOUSLY DAMAGED HAIR.
Protective styles can be ideal for growing out a chemical process, but if your hair still needs a lot of tender nursing, putting it up in braids or extensions might deprive it of the TLC it truly requires.

THOSE WITH DELICATE HAIR SITUATIONS.
As I mentioned in a previous chapter, if your hair is fine, it might not be able to handle any kind of extended hairstyle without breakage, and if your hair is thinning, pulling it into even the loosest protective styles, might cause it undue strain.

Main Point: If you’ve tried to grow out your hair with protective styles, and it just hasn’t worked, then low-manipulation styles are probably your best bet. Make wash-n-gos and loose twistouts (that you only have to re-style twice a week) your best friends. I also love finger coils and super loose bantu knots.
No matter what, try not to get discouraged. I know the information you find in books and online can feel contradictory at times. Extended protective styles are the best for growing out your hair! Oh no, only protective styles with your real hair will do! Low manipulation styles for the win!

*So confusing, right?! Which is it?!*

Just remember the most important thing is to pay attention to your own hair, not blindly follow the advice of others. As I've said over and over again this last decade, ‘be your own guru’.

General rule of awesome hair: if your hair “doesn’t like” a style, let that style go. Any style that causes you pain or breakage—vanquish it. And if a style works, rock it! At the end of the day, the way you nurture and take care of your hair will determine how it grows.

**WHAT’S NEXT**

I know quite a few of our curly parents are already thinking about trying out a few of these styles on their curly kids, but are already dreading the hair battles. I’ve got tips to deal with that and other curly kid issues coming up in the next chapter!
Now, you know I couldn’t leave out of here without talking about the kids! I get so many questions about these lil’ curly heads. SO many. The hair struggle is real for us curly kid parents. Read on to learn how to solve some of the top issues affecting parents who’d rather not have their children going out into the world, looking a mess.

**MY PROMISE TO YOU**

After you finish reading this section…

» You’ll know exactly how to respond when your kid says, “I HATE MY CURLS!”

» SUMMER ACTIVITIES will no longer turn your kid’s hair into a nest.

» The final bell will be rung on those ugly MORNING HAIR FIGHTS
QUESTION #1: MY DAUGHTER WANTS STRAIGHT, LONG HAIR LIKE SOME OF THE GIRLS AT HER SCHOOL. SHE LITERALLY CRIES ABOUT NOT BEING ABLE TO LOOK LIKE THE GIRLS WITH STRAIGHT HAIR.

Oh, Curlmom, you are not alone. Nearly every mom of a curly girl over the age of four has dealt with this issue. Here are some of the best tips I’ve gathered over the years to help our children learn to LOVE their curls.

1. POINT AND FLASH HER FORWARD

Whenever you see a slightly older kid, teen or an adult with the same kind of hair as your daughter, point at that person like she is a celebrity and say, “Ooh! Her hair is SO BEAUTIFUL. That’s what your hair will look like when you’re older!” Keep on bringing up that person’s hair throughout the rest of the day. You seriously cannot gush enough.

Live some place where curlies just don’t abound? Do this randomly when you’re surfing the internet. If you see someone with a great head of curls, run don’t walk, to show your daughter her picture and gush all over it. Seeing you get excited about the potential of her hair will get her excited about it as well.

2. LET HER WEAR A CHEAP WIG

on Halloween or around the house. Sounds counterintuitive, but suddenly getting long hair* with all its ensuing problems will turn off most kids who’ve never actually had to deal with long hair before. A few hours in a Monster High™ wig and your kid will be spitting strands of hair out of her mouth as she begs you to take it off.

* As a melinated momma, she does have a huge Angela Davis fro she likes to play dress up in!
3. COMPLIMENT HER

Many of us just aren’t liberal with compliments when it comes to our children. We worry about raising ‘big-headed’, self-absorbed, vain children. No one wants to be the mother of that one girl we knew growing up, who had nothing going for her but her superhuman ability to preen, but if your child is in a mostly non-curly class and receiving no compliments at home or school, that’s a problem. As parents, we are our children’s first role models. We are the ones responsible for helping them form their self-image and identity before society gets a hold of them. Trust, there is absolutely nothing wrong with telling your child that she is smart, pretty, and has a beautiful head of hair every single day…or more!

4. MAKE IT A CHOICE

Help her understand that loving or hating your hair is a choice. Say something like, “You can choose to dislike your hair, but I think it’s beautiful, so I’m going to choose to love it.” This is a great way to teach her about basic self-direction. Help her understand that it is up to her—not others—to dictate how she perceives herself now, and she’ll be able to use that lesson for the rest of her life.

5. LEAD BY EXAMPLE

If you’re natural, don’t be afraid to compliment yourself, Mama! Getting past our own self-consciousness to admire yourself out loud by saying things like, “My hair looks great!” and “I love my curls” is a great way to model good hair esteem. If you love yourself and your curls, chances are your daughter will do the same. Eventually she’ll start complimenting your curls, too. Seriously, you have no idea how much better a good hair day becomes when you get a breakfast table compliment from your curly hair loving daughter. Remember our children emulate us. They play in our shoes, try on our clothes, and in the early years, we’re their biggest heroes. Making sure your child’s biggest hero loves herself out loud is a great way to ensure she does the same for her children someday.
Gia loves my hair so much that she often wants to rock the same styles. So when I get the, ‘can I wear it down today?’ question, this is our compromise: I love that she loves her hair *pats self on back* and want her to experience it in all of its curly glory, but all I can think is, ‘but who’s gonna detangle it, tho?’ So here’s our regimen for this look:

» Start with stretched hair (an old twist or braid-out or an old roller-set will do ya. I keep her stretched hair in French braids or twisted ponytails at all times, so it’s usually detangled. If not, I use my fingers and a light oil)

» Grab medium-sized sections (ain’t got no time for parts) and twist using raw shea butter

» Take a twist, lightly wet the very end and twirl around your finger to create a coil/curl using your favorite curl cream. This creates a nice, neat finish and keeps the twists from unraveling. Repeat with the remaining twists.

» Rock a satin scarf or bonnet at night to keep the situation laid.

Opting for a butter instead of a water-based styling cream gives her a nice sheen and optimal hang time, but after day 2 or 3 of constant hair whipping, the situation gets frizzy. I usually re-twist the front pieces and put the rest in a ponytail or bun until we re-wash or re-style.
QUESTION #2: LAST SUMMER MY CHILD WENT TO DAY CAMP AND HER HAIR WAS A TOTAL NEST BY THE FALL. HOW DO I KEEP THAT FROM HAPPENING THIS SUMMER?

In general we all want our children to fly like birds—not get mistaken for where one would stay. When it comes to summer, children like to do the most to destroy their hair. Between swimming and running around under all those hair damaging UVs, your curly child can end up with a dry and brittle nest by the time the first day of school rolls around.

But never fear, Mama….

4 WAYS TO KEEP YOUR KIDS LOOKING AWESOME... WHEN THEY COULD ABSOLUTELY CARE LESS

DOPE (BOXER BRAIDS) CORNROW DESIGNS

Investing in the services of a professional who braids loosely and is mindful of edges will save you time and energy. Not only will you not have to worry about your child’s hair in the mornings, this is basically a protective style that will keep your child’s hair looking neat even when she is Summer Camping like a boss. Just make sure to get them re-done every two to four weeks and be extra mindful about scarfing your child up every night.
PROTECTIVE STYLES
If you don’t love cornrows or your child’s hair just doesn’t hold them all that well, consider protective styles like flat twists and two-strand twists. These styles look great and hold up to lots of play! Worried about sweat? Don’t be! Some of the same components in sweat, like lactate and urea, can be also be found in skin lotions. And sweat has a few properties that might actually help you ward off certain micro-organisms. So let your child sweat away, and save yourself some frustration by skipping any hairstyle (press and curls, flat irons, etc) that can be sweated out.

CURLY FISH
Ugh! Swim days! They make the kiddos so happy, but chlorine is a total hair destroyer. So here’s what to do you do if your child is attending a summer camp that clocks major pool time.

THE CURLY FISH SWIM DAY FORMULA:

Step 1: Put your kiddo’s hair in a protective style if it isn’t already.
Two French Braids or if you’re just stupid rushing, a braided ponytail. But no matter what, little curlies shouldn’t wear their hair loose on swim days.

Step 2: Hop in the shower and saturate hair.
Pre-swim rinse offs are often a required must for good public pool hygiene and at many summer camps. If you’re not with your child, make sure she knows that this step not only shouldn’t be skipped, but should also include saturating all of her hair. Remember, the more water her hair absorbs in this step, the less chlorine it will absorb when she’s swimming.

Step 3: A satin-lined wave cap then the silicone swim cap.
Donning a satin lined wave cap will protect your child’s hair from the silicone swim cap. Make sure the swim cap fully covers the wave cap. If your child will be away from you when she is swimming, go over this step at home, so that she can do it by herself at camp.
**Step 4: SWIM!!**
This will be the step she likes the most.

**Step 5: Rinse hair in the shower until you no longer smell any chlorine.**
If your daughter is doing this step herself, let her know in the firmest way possible that she shouldn’t come home to you smelling like chlorine. That’s an easy way for both you and her to know she’s doing this step properly.

**Step 6: Quick Rinse Conditioner**
After so many years of having her hair done—often grumpily, your daughter will get a kick out of doing this herself. Make sure to pack a cheapie conditioner into her swim bag. If her hair smells like conditioner and not chlorine when she gets home, this is an easy way to tell that she’s doing swim day right.

**Step 7: Spray with a Leave-in Conditioner**
This is another thing to pack in a special travel bottle for your daughter if you can’t accompany her to the pool. (Seriously, this is one of the best ways to prepare your daughter to eventually start doing her hair herself.)

**Step 8: Brush down any loose hairs and put her in a scarf.**
If you won’t see your daughter until later that night, simply spray in more leave in conditioner and do this step at home.

**Step 9: Pre-Poo on Your Regularly Scheduled Wash Day...**
There’s no need to put in extra wash days if you’re diligent about the above steps, but any week when you swim, you should pre-poo your child’s hair with a good swimmer’s conditioner. Make sure to thoroughly coat the hair then cover it with a plastic cap for about thirty minutes. Then wash and detangle as usual.

Voilá! No need to dread swimming any more.
FUN—NOT DAMAGE—IN THE SUN

The sun is absolutely great for so many things—hair and skin not so much. Put sunscreen on yourself and your children during the summer months and also get into the following habits:

» Wear wide-brimmed hats when she can—these protect both her face and her hair!

» Leave the conditioner in. The sun breaks down the hair’s protein, so leaving in the conditioner during the summer months will help keep sun damage to a minimum.

» Stay away from products with alcohol, peroxide and lemon. These three agents will dry her hair out even faster in the summer.

» Sunscreen your hair. Protect your hair like you protect your skin. Simply dilute your favorite SPF25 or more sunscreen with water in a spray bottle. Shake it up and spray it on your child’s hair daily.
QUESTION #3: MY KID FIGHTS ME ON DOING HER HAIR EVERY. SINGLE. MORNING. SERIOUSLY, NIKKI, HELP!

This is actually the number one complaint I get from parents of curlies. And it can be even worse for the parents who don’t share the same hair texture as their child. Even if they’re not really hurt, curly kids will sometimes cry and whine over even the gentlest tugs on her hair. And who wants to feel like they’re hurting their child every single morning?

But try out these Hair Fight Busters to End the Civil War….

1. REFRAME THE ANNOUNCEMENT

Instead of telling your child it’s time to get her hair done, announce that “Yay! It’s time to do your hair!” Be silly! Have fun! She’ll get into the spirit, too. One curl mom I know plays an upbeat song her kids love when it’s time to do their hair in the morning.

2. PIT YOUR CHILDREN AGAINST EACH OTHER.

Try the M&M Game: Whoever goes first gets 2 M&Ms and whoever goes last gets 1. The only fight you’ll have to deal with after that is who gets to go first. Hate sweets? Swap the M&M out with a cube of cheese. Kids and lab rats are sort of the same when it comes to this game.

3. PROTECTIVE STYLES AND/OR DETANGLE RIGHT AND MORE OFTEN.

The number one way to cut down on wash day detangle fights is to wet your child’s hair (NEVER detangle on dry hair) and finger detangle with plenty of leave-in-conditioner at least once between wash days. There are a few moms who do this every day—especially if their children have looser curls and wear their hair down on the regular. Or you can simply put freshly detangled hair into a loose braid or twist style, so that it stays nice and detangled until the next wash day. Either way, jump back, Tangle Satan! Knot Today. Knot Today.
4. SIMPLY DON’T RESPOND.
It sounds like a cruel suggestion to just ignore your child when she’s caterwauling about the terrible things you’re doing to her so very pitifully. But children sometimes feed off of negative attention. Try just ignoring the complaints for 5 days straight. Chances are, without any response from you, the whining will die an attention-starved death.

5. AFTER... THEN...
You don’t have to be mean about this, just simply make getting her hair done a step toward doing or getting whatever it is your child wants to do or have next. Start using this method with high value items on the weekend, when the stakes are low. For example, “As soon as we do your hair, we’ll leave for Zahali’s party!” or “Sure, you can play with my iPad—right after we do your hair.” Don’t bother arguing with your kid, just make hair a natural first step on the path to getting what he or she wants.

I’m so glad that I’m ending this book with a section about children. As a curly mom, I know for sure that our children are the future. If we teach them to love and take care of their curls today, they’ll never be dependent on a stylist to make their hair look great! I also love that by teaching our children about their hair, we’re also teaching them to be independent and even more importantly, hold themselves in good esteem.
CONGRATULATIONS!

You made it to the end. Between school, work, family, and adulting, finding the time to read a book is hard these days.

For some of you, this might be your first step on the natural hair journey. For others, it was simply another affirmation and assurance that you're doing the right thing for you. For others still, this book is simply a quick pocket reference for your hair woes. Being natural isn’t always easy, and it’s important for you to know that. But whatever challenges you’re struggling with, you have the ability to overcome them.

Unfortunately, we still live in a society that tells us we aren’t good enough. A society, which tells us that cornrows aren’t acceptable, but boxer braids are. A society, which tells us, your natural hair is somehow unnatural, or inappropriate at certain times, for certain places or at certain events. But our community at curlynikki.com represents you. We all have our struggles, and in the community is where we find common cause. Maybe it’s your boss passively telling you to straighten your hair so that it’s more presentable for work. Or maybe it’s your significant other who loves everything about you, except your hair. Or last but not least, maybe it’s you. Whomever the culprit, understand that you’ll never have to be alone again.

Whatever style you’re rocking: from twistouts to afros to cornrows, you are beautiful just the way you are. If I’m being honest though, I can’t make you feel beautiful. I can only reaffirm what’s already there and provide you with the confidence to do things you’ve never had the courage
to do before. I’m here to help you enhance it, and surround you amongst millions of Curlfriends around the world who are all struggling with the same thing. Because when you believe you look good, there’s a much better chance that you feel good.

I still can’t believe that it’s been 10 years since we started this journey. I was away at college at an institution that was diversity-challenged. Can we say… struggle. When the first thing you do after getting on campus is search for a ‘Black’ beauty salon and you find there isn’t one. Can we say… struggle. When the “ethnic section” is only two shelves long, and they’re down to the last conditioner, and the shampoo is on backorder for the next two weeks. Finally, let the church say…struggle. When you’ve checked online, the store said it was in stock, only to get there and they can’t locate the product. (Pulls out phone, calls in sick to work. Grabs a pint of ice cream to go, binge watches How To Get Away With Murder reruns). This might still be the reality for some, but we’ve come so far since then.

Two beautiful girls, 19 and 21 not too long ago became the youngest women (Black too) to open a beauty supply in the state of California. You know where they found the confidence to do that? You. So if you ever felt like you’ve needed me to survive this everyday struggle, know that I need you just as much, if not more. (Cues that scene from Lean on Me where the students sing ‘Fair Eastside’)

Before I head out though, I have to ask a small favor from you. For this moment, I need you to put down your drink, your rat-tail comb and your baby (Please don’t drop your baby). Okay, you ready? Cool. Listen up. Regardless of where you are on this journey, promise me this one thing. That no matter why or what influenced you to start, that this hair journey becomes a personal journey for you. As your hair grows, (literally and figuratively) you have to grow with it. I don’t care how many compliments you got at the day party this past weekend. None of it really matters if you didn’t wake up to do you for you. How does that J. Cole line go? “No such thing as a hair that’s better than yours”? (Okay, I added
my own little twist.) When you wake up everyday, ask yourself where your source of happiness comes from. Ask yourself, what can I do in this very moment to become a better me. Now go do it!

Please consider this (my second book) my gift to you, and I sincerely hope you’ve gotten something valuable out of it. Its’ production has been a labor of love and I offer it to you in that same loving spirit. Your support means the world to me, and I mean that from the bottom of my heart. So thank you, thank you, thank you!

Signed,

Just a girl from Fort Walton, Florida,

NIKKI WALTON
Photo Credits:
Page 68: Danielle V.
Page 69: (Left) Ashley H. (Right) Tessa J.C.
The revolution continues. And as wars go, there will be casualties. As the #1 AUTHORITY ON NATURAL HAIR and editor of the most trafficked natural hair website in the world, Nikki Walton has her fingers on the pulse of the battlefield and understands that what used to be a glamorous hair-do can quickly become a hideous hair-don’t, won’t or can’t.

A necessary follow up to her NAACP Image Award nominated, bestselling book, BETTER THAN GOOD HAIR, the new WHEN GOOD HAIR GOES BAD, will arm women with the knowledge they need to re-moisturize, refortify, regrow and recover from any damage they may inflict on their crowning glory. We do a lot in the name of beauty and occasionally, that means broken, thinning, damaged, mal-shaped hair that is in need of TLC. "When Good Hair Goes Bad" is the comprehensive guide to any and all natural hair emergencies and hiccups that may arise. Pages overflowing with tips, tricks, DIY recipes, product recommendations and solutions for every natural hair issue imaginable, will make this a page-turning companion for any woman who has ever screamed "I HATE MY HAIR!"

Nikki Walton is a licensed psychotherapist with a master’s degree in Psychology from the University of North Carolina and the founder of CurlyNikki.com. She was born in Fort Walton, Florida and now resides in Washington DC.