

Your Most HEAD- SCRATCHING SCALP ISSUES, Solved!

Most of us ignore our scalps—until something goes wrong. But the scalp is actually at the root (literally!) of healthy hair, and now there are countless scalp care products and treatments on the market. Delve into the most common scalp problems and see the best at-home solutions, recommended by the GH Beauty Lab scientists and top doctors.

by APRIL FRANZINO

Flaking

The most commonly known scalp problem, flaking “can be the result of dandruff or using certain hair products that cause contact dermatitis (which leads to irritation or psoriasis), among other factors,” says Gaby Longworth, Ph.D., a trichology-certified hair practitioner in Florida. Flaking can also be brought on by seborrheic dermatitis, an overgrowth of yeast that occurs naturally on the scalp, adds Mona Gohara, M.D., an associate clinical professor of dermatology at Yale School of Medicine in New Haven, CT.

Flake Fix: If you have mild to moderate flaking, minimize the excess yeast that can cause dandruff and seborrheic dermatitis by using an anti-dandruff shampoo containing zinc pyrithione, advises Dr. Gohara. For more severe flaking, which can result from issues such as psoriasis, see a dermatologist for diagnosis and treatment. **Our pick:** GH Beauty Award winner **Head & Shoulders Smooth & Silky Shampoo**, \$6, drugstores



This page: Jeffrey Westbrook (oil swipe); Getty Images (scrub swipe). Opposite page: Getty Images (woman).

Dryness

“A dry scalp is akin to dry skin and typically the result of a lack of moisture,” Longworth says. “This can be from certain drying hair product ingredients; hot or dry weather; aging; showering with very hot water; harsh shampoos; high-heat treatments; skin conditions such as psoriasis; or hard water and mineral deposits.”

Dry Fix: To treat a dry scalp, switch to moisturizing hair products, Longworth suggests, and avoid those with drying sulfates and alcohols and high-heat styling tools like blowdryers. To treat intense dryness, “use a scalp oil to hydrate the skin,” Dr. Gohara suggests. “Apply it before bed, cover hair with a shower cap or scarf and shampoo it out in the morning.” **Pro pick:** **MoroccanOil Dry Scalp Treatment**, \$40, Sephora

Oiliness

Whether a temporary problem or a chronic one, a greasy scalp can be prompted by several factors, including genetics, hormonal sebum (skin oil) fluctuations, infrequent hair-washing (particularly in those with straight, thin or fine strands) and seborrheic dermatitis, which can manifest as an oily scalp, Dr. Gohara explains.

Oil Fix: Increase your hair-washing frequency as needed, and “use a smaller amount of conditioner than you normally do,” Dr. Gohara recommends. Avoid applying it near the scalp, which



can make the area greasy. In between, “apply a dry shampoo at the roots to help absorb excess oil and tamp down shine,” she advises. For a DIY solution, try an at-home apple cider vinegar rinse, Longworth suggests.

Our pick: GH Beauty Lab top-tested **Living Proof Perfect Hair Day Dry Shampoo**, \$28, ulta.com



Itching

Several of the culprits behind scalp flaking and dryness can also cause itching; these include adverse reactions to products, overuse of heat-styling tools, psoriasis, eczema and seborrheic dermatitis, Dr. Gohara says. Also, a tight hairstyle can put strain on the scalp’s skin, making it feel itchy.

Itch Fix: Treatments with peppermint oil or extract or tea tree oil can relieve an itchy scalp, Longworth says. If you notice the sensation after using a specific product or dye, you may have an allergy to it, Dr. Gohara notes, so swap in an alternative. (For example, some people are sensitive to paraphenylenediamine, or PPD, an ingredient in hair dye.) If the irritation occurs after hot-tool usage, reduce their use as much as possible. See a dermatologist to address chronic scalp skin conditions like psoriasis, eczema and seborrheic dermatitis. **Our pick:** GH Beauty Award winner **Royal Oils by Head & Shoulders Nighttime Scalp Tonic Lotion**, \$9, drugstores



Buildup

“Scalp buildup can be the result of washing with hard water; not rinsing hair properly so products accumulate; piling on too many heavy products close to the scalp; not shampooing correctly or frequently enough; or accumulation of oil, sweat and dead skin cells,” Longworth explains. Buildup can also contribute to oiliness or dryness and itching.

Buildup Fix: Do as you do when your facial skin is clogged: exfoliate and deep-clean. “Exfoliate residual product away with a mild scalp scrub,” Dr. Gohara advises. Shampoo more often if necessary, and when doing so, “start with a small dollop and add more as needed,” says GH Beauty Lab chemist Danusia Wnek. Distribute it evenly by squeezing it into your palms, then use your fingers to work it from your scalp to the ends. To be sure hair is completely clean, rinse away shampoo and conditioner until you feel no residue. For recurring buildup, swap in a clarifying formula for your regular shampoo once a week or as needed. **Our picks:** **Nexxus Clean & Pure Invigorating Detox Scalp Scrub**, \$15, CVS; GH Sustainable Innovation Award winner **Aveda Rosemary Mint Purifying Shampoo**, \$20, nordstrom.com

