

INGREDIENT TEA TL;DR CHEAT SHEET

The Honest Good, Bad, and Ugly of Hair Care Ingredients.

- Silicones: Smooth, frizz-fighting, can build up. Look out for dimethicone and amodimethicone. Do Not Use or Clarify to remove when hair feels heavy.
- Sulfates: Strong cleansers. SLS/SLES = deep clean; can be drying if overused. Use strategically.
- Parabens: Preservatives that keep products safe. Methyl-, ethyl-, propyl-, butyl-paraben. Mostly harmless; avoid only if you prefer "paraben-free."
- Polyquats: Conditioning magic, sometimes sticky. Polyquaternium-4, -6, -7, -10 = usual culprits for buildup.
- Proteins: Patch the hair shaft. Hydrolyzed keratin, wheat, silk = good but can over-strengthen and stiffen hair or cause breakage over long use.
- Bond Builders: Internal repair for damaged hair. K18 = main act. No silicones and no long term damage from overuse vs Olaplex.
- Product Buildup: Oils, waxes, butters, heavy creams = buildup city. Clarifying resets.
- Oils & Butters: Great for thick/dry hair, heavy for fine hair. Coconut, castor, shea = watch layering.
- Humectants: Pull in moisture from air. Glycerin, hyaluronic acid = awesome in moderate humidity, risky in extremes.
- Emollients: Smooth, reduce friction. Alcohols like cetyl/stearyl = fine, but can weigh down hair if overused.

Bottom line: Use what your hair actually needs, clarify regularly, don't over-layer, and remember — water quality + scalp balance matter as much as products.



INGREDIENT TEA DEEP DIVE

The Honest Good, Bad, and Ugly of Hair Care Ingredients.

Silicones

What they are: Lab-made polymers that coat the hair to create slip, shine & frizz control.

Why they're bad: Many commonly found silicone's in hair products are non-water soluble and can build up if you never clarify, leading to hydration not being able to penetrate into the hair cuticle where its needed to fight frizz and eventually breakage.

The real tea:

- Most silicone's are not ideal due to build up risks.
- Your frizz, products that "quit working" over time, and hair stickiness are likely the result of silicone's.
- Clarifying resets and removes them from the hair.

Avoid if: your hair gets easily weighed down, have curly hair, OR you never clarify ever.

Culprits: Dimethicone, Amodimethicone, Cyclopentasiloxane, Cyclohexasiloxane, Trimethicone, Dimethiconol, Phenyl Trimethicone

Sulfates

What they are: Strong detergents that create lather and remove oil, dirt, and buildup.

Why they're useful: Nothing cleans like a sulfate when you have actual buildup (products, minerals, oils).

Why people avoid them: They can be drying if used too often or on fragile curls.

The real tea:

- Sulfates aren't evil—they're just powerful.
- How often you use them matters more than whether they exist.
- Great for: oily scalps, clarifying, swimmers, heavy stylers.
- Not ideal for: daily use on dry, curly, or color-treated hair.

Culprits: Sodium Lauryl Sulfate (SLS), Sodium Laureth Sulfate (SLES), Ammonium Lauryl Sulfate, Ammonium Laureth Sulfate, TEA-Lauryl Sulfate

Polyquats (Polyquaterniums)

What they are: Positively charged conditioning agents that stick to the hair to improve slip & manageability.

Why they're helpful: Reduce static, frizz, and flyaways; make hair feel smooth without oils.

Where they go wrong: Some polyquats are not water soluble → can create buildup over time.

Signs you have polyquat buildup: waxy-feeling hair, sticky roots, no movement, hard-to-remove residue.

The real tea:

- They're amazing... until they aren't.
- If your hair suddenly stops behaving, clarify.
- Avoid if: if you never clarify.

Culprits: Polyquaternium-4, Polyquaternium-6, Polyquaternium-7, Polyquaternium-10, Polyquaternium-37, Polyquaternium-44

Proteins (Strength) vs Bond Builders (Repair)

Proteins

What they do: Patch tiny holes and cracks in the cuticle to reduce breakage, frizz, and mushy hair.

Think: reinforcement on the outside.

Signs you need protein:

- Hair feels too soft or mushy
- Hair stretches and doesn't bounce back

Signs you've overdone it:

- Hair feels stiff, rough, or brittle

Hydrolyzed Keratin, Hydrolyzed Wheat Protein, Hydrolyzed Soy Protein, Hydrolyzed Rice Protein, Hydrolyzed Silk Protein, Collagen Amino Acids

Bond Builders (K18/Olaplex and other brand bond builders)

What they do: Repair internal disulfide bonds that break from lightening, heat, and chemical services.

Think: structural repair on the inside.

Signs you need bond repair:

- Lightened hair or chemically altered hair.
- Snappy, stretchy breakage
- Hair that feels "hollow" or oddly fragile

Bis-Aminopropyl Diglycol Dimaleate (Olaplex), Succinic Acid (K18), Maleic Acid (L'Oréal/Redken), Citric Acid (bonding lines — acidic = bond reinforcement), Lactic Acid (bonding conditioners)

Key difference:

- Protein = patches the roof
- Bond repair = fixes the foundation

Oils & Butters

What they do: Sit on top of the hair to add shine and reduce frizz.

What they don't do: Moisturize. Water moisturizes. Oils seal.

Oils and Butters found in the ingredient list of hair products need to be formulated to the right molecular size to be absorbed by the hair/scalp. Your homemade oil and butter treatments are not going to be as effective and may lead to build up and blockage.

Problems:

- They attract dirt
- They block moisture
- They are difficult to remove
- They can suffocate the scalp
- Best for: thick, coarse, high-porosity hair.
- Avoid on: scalp, fine hair, low-porosity hair, or anyone who hates waxy buildup.

Humectants (Hydration Helpers)

Examples: glycerin, panthenol, hyaluronic acid.

What they do: Pull moisture from the air into the hair.

When they work: humidity is moderate.

When they backfire: humectants in very dry climates pull moisture out of your hair instead.

Best practice: mix humectants with occlusives or conditioners for controlled hydration.

The Ones That Misbehave in Super-Dry or Super Humid Weather: (Not bad — just temperamental.)

- Glycerin
- Propylene Glycol
- Butylene Glycol
- Sodium PCA
- Honey Extract
- Sodium Hyaluronate (Hyaluronic Acid)

Emollients

Examples: fatty alcohols (cetyl, stearyl), esters, lightweight oils.

What they do: Soften, smooth, and reduce friction.

Why they're great: They don't cause buildup as easily as heavy oils or butters.

Best for: literally everyone.

Product Buildup (Sabatoge)

What it is: Layers of products that don't fully wash out (like oils, butters, silicones, polyquats, waxes).

Why it sucks:

- Hair stops absorbing moisture
- Roots get heavy
- Curls won't curl
- Products stop working

Fix:

- Clarifying shampoo → every 2–4 weeks
- Chelating shampoo → for hard water or mineral buildup
- Prevention:
- Rotate products
- Don't layer 12 leave-ins
- Rinse thoroughly
- Don't fear clarifying

HOW TO READ YOUR PRODUCT BOTTLE IN 10 SECONDS

Your hair care is only as good as what you put on your hair. Make sure your foundations are good.

1. Scan the first 5 ingredients.

If the first few lines are water + a bunch of silicones, heavy oils, or waxy stuff... your hair might get weighed down or coated.

2. Hunt for silicones.

Look for anything ending in -cone, -conol, -silane, -siloxane. (If you prefer lightweight, buildup-free hair... skip it.)

3. Check for polyquats.

Avoid Polyquaternium-4, 7, 10, 11, 28, 37 if you get buildup easily. ("Polyquat" = potential coating; not all are bad, but many are stubborn.)

4. Spot the sulfates.

SLS, SLES, ALS = strong. Not evil, but can be too much for dry, color-treated, or curly hair.

5. Look for the "good stuff" near the top.

If your "miracle ingredient" is ingredient #37... it's basically there for vibes, not results.

6. Watch for drying alcohols.

Avoid SD Alcohol, Alcohol Denat, Isopropyl Alcohol high on the list. (Fatty alcohols like Cetyl, Cetearyl, Stearyl = good guys.)

7. Use the texture test. If the bottle says "lightweight" but the ingredients scream "thick, creamy silicone smoothie," trust the list—not the marketing.

8. When in doubt, send it to your stylist. A 3-second screenshot of the ingredients saves you from 3 months of buildup.

