

What kind of hair products like shampoos, conditioners, things like that should be avoided? Are there any concerns about foiling the hair or lightening the hair?

A panel of cicatricial alopecia experts answered this question during the 2016 Patient Conference in New Orleans, LA. We've adapted their answers to create this tip sheet on haircare in patients with scarring alopecia.

Yolanda Lenzy, MD: One of the things I recommend to my patients is to use sulfate-free products. Studies have shown that sulfate can be drying to the hair. While it doesn't affect the scarring aspect, for a lot of our African American patients who already have very dry hair, adding a sulfate to it can be a double whammy. Patients with color tend to have dryer hair, so the sulfates can make things worse. I recommend something called deep conditioning, which is putting conditioner on strands, then putting a shower cap on that generates body heat, then rinsing it with cool water. That can lead to a lot of softening. I'm really encouraging people to be more natural and not use chemical relaxers. So, the deep conditioning can help counter balance that.

Ronda Farah, MD: We try to avoid any products where the patient notes any stinging, burning, pain, itching, or redness. That could mean you have an allergy or some sort of sensitivity that can contribute to the current problem or add a secondary issue to what's already going on.

Wilma Bergfeld, MD: I think it's very important that the dermatologist or physician caring for the patient with inflammatory scalp disease actually talks about hair care. That has to be part of the regiment introduced. In many of our patients, we need to use shampoos and adapt to the kind of hair we are looking at as to the scalp condition. We may have to use topical agents that might be in the form of steroids calcineurin inhibitors, minoxidil, or whatever. However, scalp care is as important as any oral drug or active drug that you're going to put on it. It's very important as stated that you make sure, especially in the African female, that you don't break their hair with whatever you're doing. Moisturizing in that group is very important. In the Caucasian or Asian female, some of the new conditioners are great. They strengthen the hair fibers, and they prevent breakage even in damaged, bleached, or permed hair.

Antonella Tosti, MD: I really think it's very important for folliculitis decalvans patients to use shampoo daily containing ketoconazole or other active ingredients, and that's in the maintenance of disease when you stop antibiotics. It's very important.

I find sometimes there are conflicting interests with shampoo because sometimes what is great for the scalp and for dandruff is very hard on the hair shaft. How do you reconcile that?

Melissa Piliang, MD: I tell my patients that shampoo is for the skin of scalp and not necessarily for your hair. So you massage into your skin then rinse. Then your conditioner is for strands, so from ear level down is where you put conditioner. You don't want to put all that oil back on the scalp.

Yolanda Lenzy, MD: I do something very similar, but I have patients use a moisturizing shampoo for a second wash. I have them put the medicated shampoo on dry for 10 minutes, then wet their hair, lather it up, and rinse it out, then follow up with moisturizing shampoo, which will help the whole strands, then follow up with conditioner. I call it the 1-2 punch.