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A lather over sulfates

Popular sulfate-free shampoos are great for keeping in keratin and color — and not so great for sudsing and cleaning.

By Ashley Primis
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Doctors, nutritionists — even cereal boxes — have long been warning us to watch our salt intake. Now, we can hear the same counsel from the most unlikely of sources: our hairdressers.

What once was the scapegoat of the curly-haired set — sulfates are the devil behind frizz! — has now become the moan of the mainstream. Hair products claiming they are free of sulfates are

flooding the market, and local salons are giving them serious shelf space.

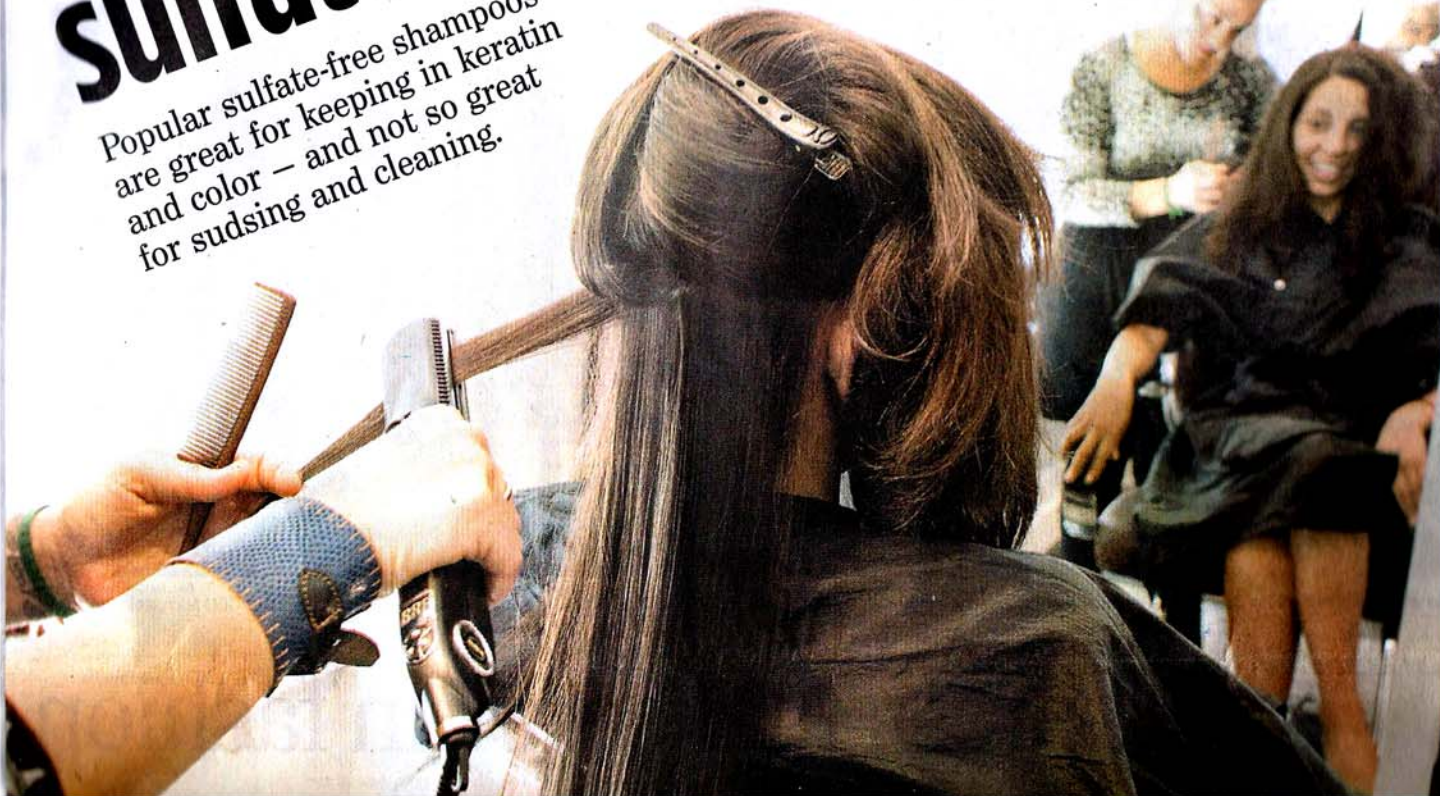
The culprit for this mass-appeal movement? Keratin treatments.

If you haven't heard of the service that can cost hundreds of dollars, it's a retexturizing process in which keratin proteins are applied to the hair with heat, supposedly delivering smoother, softer, frizz-free tresses. And those treatments — especially popular with women who spend their

See **SULFATE-FREE** on C3

At Salon Vanity on Walnut,

Heather O'Malley uses a flat iron on Ana Delgado's hair, sealing in the keratin texturizing solution she applied. Sulfate can strip out the keratin.



ED HILLE / Staff Photographer

Sulfate Soup

Decoding ingredients on a shampoo label can make anyone's head spin, especially since the sulfate debate still rages. Most experts agree that sodium chloride is a no-no (especially for keratin users) and sodium lauryl sulfate should be avoided. Some, like Salon Vanity's Edmondo Blando, say a little sodium laureth sulfate in a reputable product is OK. (And might even help remove dulling buildup.) Here, a list of sulfate-free products that Blando and Hush Salon's Adrienne Rogers recommend to their clients.

— Ashley Primis



Redken Nature's Rescue Refreshing Detox Shampoo, \$17, at Hush Salon, 45 N. Third St., 2d floor, 215-923-5010, hushsalon.com or redken.com.



Cutler Specialist Cleansing + Conditioner with Sea Kelp, \$22, at Hush Salon.



It's a 10 Miracle Leave-in Product, \$20, at Salon Vanity, 1701 Walnut St., 215-925-2211, vanityphilly.com or itsa10haircare.com.



Pureology Hydrate shampoo, \$29, at Salon Vanity or pureology.com.



L'Oréal Paris Professionnel Delicate Color Shampoo, \$25, at Salon Vanity or lorealparisusa.com.

Sulfate-free shampoos, latest hair-care style

morning hours wielding blow-dryers and round brushes - will last longer, product-makers swear, if they stay away from protein-stripping sulfates.

Since 2006 Edmondo Blando has seen a "dramatic increase" in customers wanting keratin treatments at his Center City Salon Vanity - creating an even greater sulfate-free demand. "We do two to four a day in May through August, and then one a day, for sure, all year."

But even non-keratin users have started snubbing sulfates because the chemicals are also thought to irritate the scalp and strip the hair color that people pay a pretty penny for.

It's likely why Vanity now sells more sulfate-free than sulfate-full shampoos these days. "I believe it's because of the marketing hype, and also because our customers are more educated, and understand that sulfates will strip out color and essential oils faster," Blando said. Be on the lookout for more sulfate-free products, like mousses and gels and even body washes, he says.

Helene Golombek of Mount Laurel describes her pre-keratin hair as "frizzy, unmanageable ... think Monica on *Friends* when she was in Mexico." But she admits that although it's been about a year since her last treatment, she's hooked on the sulfate-free shampoos - even though having less of the bad stuff can mean coughing up more coin. "I think it's worth the money. I think my hair is healthier and shinier."

Adrienne Rogers of Old City's Hush Salon has worked with great sulfate-free products at a variety of price points, but suggests that everyone should "read the back of the label because it's buyer beware." While the Food and Drug Administration regulates labeling, products branded sulfate-free still might contain the very ingredients users are trying to avoid. Specifically, keratin-killer sodium chloride can be found in some products that are labeled sulfate-free.

Traces of other sulfates, though, aren't so terrible, Blando said. It depends on the amount of other buffers in any product. "A well-made brand will not add tons of sulfates," he said. "They should be at least the third or fourth ingredients on the list."

But in general, most sulfate-free products get the thumbs up. "I'm a big fan," Blando said. "They will not dry out the hair, strip out the minerals, or remove hair color."

So why aren't all shampoos sulfate-free? In short, because they don't lather. (DevaCurl, a longtime leader of the sulfate-free movement, calls one of its shampoos "No-Poo.") And like other expectations people have about their medicine-cabinet products - mouthwash should burn, astringent should sting - shampoos should whip up into a helmet of frothy bubbles. In fact, that's how most people measure the squeaky-cleaness of their hair.

"It's a big disappointment for some," said Blando, who often tells clients that a big lather isn't the only way to get clean. "Europeans have been using products without sulfates for 30 years. They are more used to not having bubbly suds everywhere. We just need to get used to it."

Rogers suggests that we rethink what Mom taught us in the tub as tots. Instead of scrubbing the scalp to get a big lather, it's better to gently rub and work the product into the strands to pull out the dirt.

She specifically likes Cutler Specialist Cleansing + Conditioner, a \$22 shampoo and conditioner in one, available in her salon. "It's a whole different animal. It doesn't foam, and has no sulfates. It's a cream that doesn't lather."

While Blando sells and suggests sulfate-free products more and more, he also notes that lackluster hair might need a good, sulfate-filled cleansing on occasion to get its bounce back. He says the sulfate-free products aren't quite able to remove all the pollutants that our locks trap daily. Especially, he says, because the most popular products these days are oil- and silicon-based, which can attract gunk and buildup.

If you also have an active lifestyle and sweat a lot, the products without sulfates might not be cleansing enough.

"If women use sulfate-free shampoos for too long, their hair gets dull. Regular shampoos wash out all the grunge that sulfate-free doesn't get."

Which is why he starts most treatments at his salon with a good, old-fashioned knuckle-powered sudsing.



ED HILLE / Staff Photographer

Stylist Heather O'Malley with Ana Delgado at Salon Vanity, now selling more sulfate-free than sulfate-full shampoos.