

Top 5 Shampoo Alternatives and How They Stack Up

If you've ever taken a look at the ingredients of a typical shampoo bottle, you've probably felt deep confusion, and even a bit of alarm.

Last year, I did something I've strangely never done before – I read the ingredients listed on my bottle of Pantene Pro-V shampoo and realized I understood only one ingredient: water. The rest was a mumbo jumbo of hard-to-pronounce chemicals that I spent my apres-shower hour googling.

Turns out several of these ingredients are skin irritants (sodium lauryl sulfate, sodium laureth sulfate) and a few that are much more dangerous. The worst offender, methylisothiazolinone, was found in recent animal studies to be toxic to brain cells, even for brief exposures at low concentrations. And I was using this stuff every day!

Well, no more. I was determined to end my chemical shampoo slavery and find better, all-natural options for my hair, scalp, and body.

Here's what I found during my journey into shampoo alternatives, in no particular order. If you're also planning a break-up with shampoo, you'll want to give this a read.

Baking Soda, aka Bicarbonate of Soda

Baking soda was the first shampoo alternative I tried, mainly because there was a big tub of it already lying around in the kitchen, waiting for a purpose.

To use it, you'll want to dissolve a teaspoon of baking soda

in a cup of water, slowly pour it over your hair, give yourself a little head massage to work the mixture through your strands and then wash it all out.

How does baking soda stack up? Honestly, it'll leave your hair feeling squeaky clean but also a little dry, brittle and rough. This effect mostly has to do with the fact that baking soda is highly alkaline with a pH of 9.0 while wet hair is naturally a little more acidic with a pH of around 4.5 to 5.5. Since alkalines tend to open hair cuticles (while acids close them), the very alkaline baking soda opens up your cuticles and allows the hair to absorb too much water, resulting in raised and jagged cuticles that make your hair feel rough and brittle.

Overall, baking soda may be too harsh for most people since normal hair needs a shampoo (alternative) with a pH between 4.5 and 6.7. For those with oily hair, however, a more alkaline solution works great in balancing things out so if you've got oily locks – baking soda might be great shampoo alternative for you. Just make sure you don't use it too often!

Apple Cider Vinegar

The above baking soda is very alkaline, and when used alone, it can leave your hair feeling dry and brittle. Add in acidic apple cider vinegar, however, and you've got a much better pH-balanced shampoo and rinse combo!

To use apple cider vinegar, mix it in a ratio of 2 tbsp of vinegar to 1 cup of water. After you've "shampoo-ed" with your baking soda mixture, apply your apple cider vinegar solution on the length of your hair. There's no need to apply it near your roots. Wash out.

And don't worry about smelling vinegar-y all day – the smell goes away as soon as your hair's dry.

Castille Soap

Much like baking soda, Castille soap is very alkaline and will leave your hair looking brittle and dry if you use it alone. Also like baking soda, Castille soap is ridiculously good at multi-tasking. You can use the stuff as a shampoo, body wash, laundry detergent, and dishwashing soap. So if you're looking to condense a lot of your soapy needs down to one product, Castille soap just might be your answer. Just make sure you use it with a balancing acidic rinse like apple cider vinegar and again, don't use it too often!

Clay

Both Bentonite and Rhassoul are healing, detoxing clays that are used for everything from tightening pores to removing toxins from the body. But did you know they also make great shampoos?

Clays make the perfect shampoo alternative since they're chock full of nourishing minerals, provide deep cleansing, and leave your hair both clean and conditioned. They're also pH-balanced – a mixture of 1 tablespoon of Rhassoul clay and 8 ounces of water has a pH of around 6, which is pretty close to your hair's natural pH.

To use, mix clay with water until you get a consistency resembling an egg yolk. Wet your hair and then wring it out. Slowly pour the mud mixture over your head and work it through to the tips. Give yourself a little mud shampoo pack for around 5 minutes and wash everything out.

If you want, feel free to add an apple cider vinegar rinse afterward!

Coconut Milk and Aloe Vera Gel

This coconut milk and aloe vera gel shampoo alternative is also pH-balanced and is perfect for those of us with dry, damaged hair. Coconut milk is very soothing for dry, itchy scalps and the saturated fats in it help repair damaged hair.

The only downside to this shampoo alternative is that it goes bad. Fast. The best solution to make it last is to make a big batch and then freeze most of it into “shampoo cubes.”

To make this shampoo alternative, you’ll need a can of coconut milk and around 2 cups of pure aloe vera gel. Simply whisk the two ingredients together until they’re fully mixed and then pour the mixture into ice cube trays and freeze them. You can take a cube out the night before you plan to use it and leave it in a bowl in the fridge to thaw. If you don’t use the whole cube (you probably won’t), put the leftovers in the fridge.

The thing about swearing off shampoo is that it opens you up to a whole world of natural shampoo alternatives you might never have thought to try. And once your hair adjusts to the fact that it’s free of shampoo for good – you’ll be pleasantly surprised to find that it doesn’t need store-bought shampoo to stay clean, hydrated, and gorgeous. Plus, you’ll get a kick out of telling strangers who compliment your hair that you actually haven’t shampooed for months!