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How Heat Works

According to Shab Caspara, New York trichologist and founder of hair-care platform Leona.co, heat tools work by altering the structure of the hair. "Heat straightens hair by temporarily breaking the hydrogen bonds found in the structure of hair," she explains.

When those bonds are broken, the hair can't hold its original pattern, leaving curly hair straight. The reason why it doesn't last forever is because those hydrogen bonds reform when exposed to moisture.

The biggest issue with heat straightening is the damage it can cause. According to Montclair, NJ dermatologist Jeanine Downie, MD, that damage can last a long time. "The damage you get from blowdryers can ruin your hair for years," she says. "The quality of your hair can look dull, less shiny and lifeless."

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How Experts Prevent Heat Damage

According to both Caspara and Dr. Downie, a great place to start preventing heat damage is before we ever turn on our styling tools.

"Thermal protectants are truly wonderful solutions for preventing damage and prolonging straight styles through hold and humidity control," Caspara explains.

Dr. Downie notes that any hair type can benefit from using these products. "I recommend heat protection for any type of hair—straight, curly or kinked, it does not matter," she says.

Hairstylists also use heat protectant products to help seal moisture in and reduce frizz. "I use our Serum Spray," Rosebrook says. "This will create a barrier between the hair and the heat, reducing the risk of damage."

Master stylist and colorist Paul Labrecque of Paul Labrecque Salon and Skincare Spa also relies on thermal protectants when styling. "I love and recommend using my Repair Style Hydrating Repair Lotion," he says. "It is as a leave-in treatment that will protect the hair."

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Heat protectants should be used on all hair types."

—DR. DOWNIE

Chemical Creations

Just like heat straightening, chemical hair straightening has a long history. They also accomplish something no other styling methods can: a semi-permanent change in the hair. Heat straightening and natural methods will always fade back to a normal hair texture, usually as soon as the hair gets wet. However, chemical straightening can take the hair from frizzy curls to sleek and straight for months at a time.

According to Caspara, right now, chemical treatments are the only option we have to accomplish this. "For long-term or permanent results, chemicals are required to alter the structure of the hair texture by either breaking the bonds in the hair and resetting them to straight, or infusing the hair with ingredients that tame frizz and texture," she says.

The problem is that several of these treatments come with drawbacks, and some of them are very serious.

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A hexagonal seal with a double-lined border. Inside the border, the words "TOP DOCTORS" are written in a semi-circle at the top, and "NEWBEAUTY™" is at the bottom. In the center, the year "2023" is displayed, with "20" over "23". Two small stars are positioned on either side of the year.