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More hair products using ingredients commonly found in skincare



In recent years, scientists have found that hair's real vitality rests at its foundation: the scalp. PHOTO: ISTOCKPHOTO



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SINGAPORE – Gone are the days when haircare routines were restricted to the one-size-fits-all approach of wash and go. Today's hair products and treatments have evolved to mirror the sophistication of skincare regimens.

A number of new formulations – from both haircare giants and cult favourite brands – have entered the market in recent months, incorporating ingredients more commonly found in face creams.

However, hair is unlike skin, as it is composed of dead cells and unable to heal itself through normal biological processes. As such, hair potions in the past often offered temporary results, functioning primarily by hydrating and sealing the hair to create a glossy, sleek and voluminous appearance.

In recent years, scientists have found that hair's real vitality rests at its foundation: the scalp. A 2021 study published in the International Journal Of Cosmetic Science concluded that the quality of the hair which is produced depends on the scalp, and the negative effects on hair can be reversed by boosting scalp health.

As such, active ingredients that were traditionally reserved for skincare, like hyaluronic acid, peptides and antioxidants, are finding their way into haircare products. This new beauty trend, called the "skinification" of hair, has resulted in a boom of ingredient-led products that claim to nourish, repair and protect the scalp and hair at a cellular level.

French professional haircare brand Kerastase, for instance, recently unveiled an enhanced version of its in-salon treatment, Fusio Dose. The treatment's revitalised formula now includes hyaluronic acid, amino acids, vitamin E and ceramides, and stylists are able to mix and match these ingredients to address different concerns, creating a bespoke hair treatment with each visit.

Launched in Singapore several months ago, celebrity haircare brand JVN – by American hairstylist-turned-host Jonathan Van Ness of reality TV show *Queer Eye* (2018 to present) fame – uses sustainably sourced hemisqualane instead of silicones. Hemisqualane is derived predominantly from plants and shares similar properties to squalane, which is known for its skin-strengthening and moisture-retaining abilities. Used on the hair and scalp, it is said to result in healthier and stronger locks.

Meanwhile, another new-to-Singapore brand Aromatica, which launched here earlier this year, utilises plant-derived antioxidants in its haircare line. Its rosemary haircare collection combines the antioxidants in rosemary oil with other popular skincare ingredients like probiotics and hyaluronic acid to, among other things, strengthen the hair and make it shinier.

However, Dr Kok Wai Leong, a senior consultant and dermatologist at StarMed Specialist Centre, explains that not all skincare ingredients are suitable for application on the scalp, as the scalp has a high density of hair follicles and sebaceous glands.

"The presence of hairs, oil and skin debris also confers a barrier for absorption of common products used on the face. The scalp microbiome is also different," he says, referring to the complex ecosystem of micro-organisms like bacteria that inhabit the surface of the scalp.



Dr Kok Wai Leong says skin on the head is structurally different from skin on other parts of the body. PHOTO: STARMED SPECIALIST CENTRE

In the same way that a person’s gut has a microbiome that plays a crucial role in his or her overall health, the skin and scalp also host a diverse community of micro-organisms that can impact their quality.

“Therefore, the same ingredient that works on the face may not confer the same effect on your scalp due to the structural differences,” he adds.

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Citing retinol as an example, he adds that scientific studies on the incorporation of skincare ingredients into scalp care remain limited.

“There is insufficient evidence to recommend it for use in scalp care. Moreover, the use of retinol can cause irritation in the scalp and aggravate scalp sensitivity, so do exercise caution when using it,” he says.

Despite the lack of concrete evidence, this beauty trend has taken root and is growing.

Dr Kok believes that certain ingredients that hail from the skincare realm – including salicylic acid, hyaluronic acid, shea butter and probiotics – can benefit the scalp and, therefore, hair.

However, he also notes that there is no single ingredient or product that can universally cater to the needs of everyone and a tailored approach based on scalp type is advised.

For instance, individuals with oily hair should avoid using conditioning products that contain oils or shea butter. These products leave an oily sheen on the hair and will aggravate the oily condition of the scalp.

For those with a dry scalp, it is best to avoid harsh scrubs or over-washing, he says, adding that customers should seek the advice of a dermatologist if they are unsure about a product.

The next time you look for a hair treatment product, look out for these ingredients on the label.

Peptides



Saturday Skin's Scalp + Hair Strengthening Peptide Treatment, \$30. PHOTO: SATURDAY SKIN

Peptides, which can help to rebuild and repair damaged cells and signal the skin to produce collagen, are now harnessed to repair damaged hair strands from within. They have shown promise in their ability to stimulate keratin production, which assists in maintaining the structural integrity of the hair, resulting in smoother and more resilient locks.

South Korean beauty brand Saturday Skin's Scalp + Hair Strengthening Peptide Treatment (\$30) is not just formulated with a blend of 15 proprietary peptides, but also supercharged with caffeine, hop yeast and niacinamide. Made for those with thin hair and a dry scalp, the lightweight, leave-on treatment is purportedly able to nourish the scalp and improve the volume and softness of hair.

Hyaluronic Acid



Kerasilk's Taoyaka System is a combination of in-salon treatment and an at-home haircare line. PHOTO: KERASILK

A skincare hero known for its exceptional hydration properties, hyaluronic acid is known for its ability to attract and retain moisture not just in the skin, but also possibly the hair and scalp. It can help seal cuticles, lock in moisture and tame unwanted frizz, imbuing hair with suppleness and bounce.

Professional haircare brand Kerasilk has recently launched Taoyaka System, a combination of in-salon treatment and an at-home haircare line that is specially tailored to Asians.

All products under this range contain a hero ingredient – hyaloveil – which is a type of hyaluronic acid said to penetrate deep into hair. Comprising two types of hair masks (priced at \$68 each), a shampoo (\$42) and a conditioner (\$42), the at-home treatment promises to restore the lipid levels of the inner hair for a softer and more elastic mane.

Probiotics



Aromatica's Rosemary Scalp Scaling Shampoo, \$33. PHOTO: AROMATICA

Probiotics, or beneficial live bacteria, are renowned for fostering a balanced and diverse skin microbiome. But research has shown that applying probiotics on the scalp, too, can tackle seborrheic dermatitis, which results in red, flaky patches on the skin, dandruff and other scalp-related conditions.

Formulated especially for dandruff-prone scalp, the Rosemary Scalp Scaling Shampoo (\$33) by South Korean beauty brand Aromatica contains two probiotics – bifida ferment lysate and lactobacillus ferment lysate. On top of that, the silicone- and sulfate-free shampoo contains

biotin, panthenol, niacinamide and salicylic acid, as well as antioxidants from four plant extracts. It claims these ingredients will gently remove dandruff while nourishing sensitive scalps and weak hair.

Vitamin C



Oribe's Power Drops Colour Preservation Booster, \$82. PHOTO: ORIBE

Thanks to its photo-protective superpowers, vitamin C is a popular go-to ingredient for brighter, radiant-looking skin. It is said to be just as effective on hair, boosting shine, neutralising free radical damage and even promoting hair growth and health.

American cult haircare brand Oribe's Power Drops Color Preservation Booster (\$82) contains a 2 per cent vitamin C complex – including 3-O-Ethyl ascorbic acid, one of the more potent forms of vitamin C – as well as watermelon, lychee and edelweiss flower extracts, and quinoa protein. These flavonoids are supposed to help enhance shine and extend the longevity of hair colour by shielding hair from damaging ultraviolet rays.

Caffeine



L'Oreal Paris' newly launched Elseve Full Resist Anti-Hair Fall Serum, \$19. ST PHOTO: LOUISA LIM

Recognised for its stimulating properties, topical caffeine improves blood circulation to the skin, thereby boosting elasticity and firmness. When used in haircare, it reportedly helps to deliver nutrients and oxygen to the hair follicles, resulting in thicker, healthier strands.

Caffeine is the hero ingredient in L'Oreal Paris' newly launched Elseve Full Resist Anti-Hair Fall Serum (\$19), which is specially designed for hair prone to breakage. The French beauty brand combines this ingredient with an amino acid called arginine to create Aminexil, a patented molecule that is clinically proven to reduce hair fall. The serum also contains vitamin E and sodium hyaluronate to enhance the overall health of hair.

AHA/BHA



The Inkey List's Clean & Healthy Scalp Duo, \$40. PHOTO: THE INKEY LIST

Alpha hydroxy acids (AHAs) and beta hydroxy acids (BHAs) are widely used in skincare due to their remarkable exfoliating and skin-renewing properties. As both function as skin exfoliants, albeit through different mechanisms, both AHAs and BHAs are now used to treat scalp conditions such as dandruff or flakiness.

British skincare brand The Inkey List's Clean & Healthy Scalp Duo (\$40) – comprising a scalp scrub with AHA and a scalp treatment with BHA – can be used on either wet or dry scalp for the ultimate deep cleanse. This 10-minute at-home treatment claims to eliminate dirt and dead skin cells and clear product build-up from the base of the hair follicle.

Niacinamide



Briogeo's Destined for Density serum, \$93. PHOTO: BRIOGEO

Not only does it work wonders for skin tone and texture, but topical niacinamide, or vitamin B3, also serves as an excellent anti-inflammatory agent for the scalp and has the potential to promote thicker and fuller-looking hair, according to some studies.

Boasting the ability to boost hair density by up to three times, New York-based clean haircare brand Briogeo's Destined For Density serum (\$93) contains three main ingredients: caffeine, copper peptide and niacinamide. This daily leave-on serum is meant to support thicker, fuller, healthier looking hair with its lightweight and non-greasy formula. The only catch? You need to massage it onto wet or dry hair daily for at least 16 weeks.

Zinc



The Powder Shampoo's Purifying & Regulating hair wash, \$39.90. PHOTO: THE POWDER SHAMPOO

Zinc is often added into skincare to promote clear and smooth skin and fight breakouts, but its anti-inflammatory and anti-microbial properties can also tackle a host of scalp conditions like dandruff, itchiness and scalp psoriasis. These issues are often caused by the overgrowth of yeast or fungus, and zinc can help by controlling their proliferation.

Home-grown bodycare brand The Powder Shampoo – known for its clean ethos – has added zinc into its Purifying & Regulating hair wash for limp locks and oily scalp. Priced at \$39.90 for a bottle and \$29.90 for a refill pouch, this minty shampoo is also enriched with thyme to promote hair growth and prevent hair loss, as well as papaya enzyme to eliminate sebum build-up. Like all other shampoos in its haircare range, the Purifying & Regulating hair wash is fortified with prebiotics and probiotics, and made from all-natural ingredients.

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