

(Style on a Dime) Low cost hair care

Written by Marcia Humphrey
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I can still vividly recall the hair-plaiting ritual which marked every evening during my childhood. I would sit on the floor between mama's legs while she sat perched on the edge of her favorite chair (usually) gently, (always) slowly arranging my (virgin) hair into six plaits. Upon completion of her task, while I was rising from the floor, without fail, she would call "More hair," and I would respond, "Grow Hair." (Her call was actually more like "Mo hair," which of course rhymes with "Grow hair.")

At least monthly, rather than sitting on the floor in front of mama's favorite chair, there was another chair that held vivid, slightly haunting, memories. It was the straightening-chair --the place I would go and sit after my hair was freshly washed and dried. This chair was placed directly in front of the stove, upon which sat a hot, smoking straightening comb, an old towel, and jar of hair dressing, called Hair-Rep. It was there I endured lots of old-school detangling: pulling hard, until the comb no longer got stuck. After that the entire head of hair was pressed straight-twice. Next, came the smoothing of the edges of the hairline, called the "kitchens." At least twice during every hair-straightening session, mama's hand would slip and she'd touch my ear, neck, or scalp with that hot comb. "Ouch!" I would scream, and she always replied, "Baby, mama's sorry!" Sometimes she would fib, "Mama didn't burn you, that was the hot grease touching your scalp." Either way, it was painful!

Now as a mother of two girls with lots of hair, I find myself turning into my mama, and reliving those same experiences, but from the other end. My goal is to keep my girls' hair chemical-free for as long as possible. I am always researching and experimenting with new ways to manage their hair in a healthy manner. The beauty of natural hair is that it offers almost endless styling options: curly, straight, twists, or braids, and it's fun to rock them all. What I realize is that some of the long held beliefs about natural hair are just not accurate. Based on my own experiences and what I had been taught, these are some of the hair myths that I used to believe.

Myth #1: □ If you do not have a relaxer, your pressed hair will only be straight if it is full of oil or grease.

Mythbuster: With the right techniques and hair stylist, all hair can be silky and full of body and movement. To celebrate her 13th birthday, I took my daughter Alanna to H Design Salon, in the uptown area of Minneapolis, to see Sylvia. I had heard that this lady could work serious magic on virgin (never-been-relaxed) hair of any texture. I don't know quite how, but Sylvia had my baby's hair flowing like a river. It had such body, and it looked no different than relaxed hair. Her press lasted longer than normal and the body remained. We were both thoroughly amazed. If you don't believe me, go see Sylvia for yourself.

Myth #2: Black hair can't really grow long.

Mythbuster: With proper care and feeding, Black hair can grow strong and long. Proper moisture is key-dry hair breaks continually. I have found that two of the best products for moisture and daily hair dressing come right out of the baking section of the grocery store: olive oil and coconut oil. Both are outstanding moisturizers and excellent options as hot oil treatments and as additions to your favorite conditioners. Many expensive hair products contain these

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ingredients, so why not buy them for a fraction of the cost? Daily I use a small amount of coconut oil on my girls' hair and my own prior to wrapping it with a satiny scarf. Failure to wrap hair nightly or use a satin pillowcase often leads to further breakage. Caution: When using oils as a daily hair dressing, avoid the stiff, greasy look by using an amount about the size of a dime and working it throughout the hair.

Myth #3: If your ends are trimmed, it will never grow long

Mythbuster: Many women hate cutting any amount of their hair. Truth is, a cut may be just what is needed to get your hair growing. Go to a good stylist and let him/her trim your hair and remove split ends. Once your hair is trimmed or cut, do-it-yourself-styling is easier, and trips to the salon can be less frequent, therefore less costly. A great hair information resource is www.longhaircareforum.com

. For a \$6.50 annual membership, you get to swap ideas and information with a community of women of color, who value strong, healthy, and manageable hair.

I have been teaching my girls how to care for their hair and how to love their hair-in its natural state. I think they are getting the message. When God created Eve, I am certain that He knew how much pleasure and pain her hair would bring. He knew she would want to change it often, make it curly one day and straight the next. One of the ways He decided to give us our own distinctive mark is through varying our hair textures. Our Creator is all about letting us know how special and unique we are.

Rather than complaining and cursing it, learn to love your hair and learn what makes it happy. After all, your hair, like you, is an original masterpiece-designed by God. Enjoy!

Marcia Humphrey is an interior decorator and home stager who specializes in achieving high style at a low cost. A native of Michigan, she and her husband, Lonnie, have three children.