

KEY INGREDIENT

Grass Roots

Last year saw the rise of CBD skin care: Everything from body lotion to facial moisturizer became infused with the hemp extract to add calming and anti-inflammatory benefits. Now, the “it” ingredient is carving out space in the hair-care arena too. Here’s why. —Brittany Burhop Fallon

HOW IT WORKS

Our bodies house a complex endocannabinoid system that helps regulate the daily function of our skin and other organs. When applied topically, CBD—a nonpsychoactive cannabinoid from the cannabis plant—interacts with this system and receptor sites on the skin (CB1 and CB2), helping to reduce any inflammation and irritation.

“Recent studies have shown that CB1 and CB2 have endogenous ligands on both the scalp and the hair, which suggests that the scalp and the hair have their own endocannabinoid system,” New York dermatologist Matthew Lin, MD says. “By acting on these ligands, CBD can reduce inflammatory cytokines on the scalp, and potentially improve conditions like dandruff, seborrheic dermatitis, eczema, and itchy, flaky scalp.”

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THE BENEFITS

While more research is needed to further evaluate the therapeutic effects of topical CBD on the scalp and hair in the form of shampoos, masks, oils and more, there is a band of anecdotal evidence supporting them. “CBD is rich with many vitamins and essential fatty acids that help form collagen, which nourishes scalp tissue,” says Kevin Wachs, founder and CEO of Earthly Body, the parent company of CBD hair-care brand Emera. “It also contains all 21 known amino acids, including tyrosine, which helps maintain natural hair color.”

Troy, MI plastic surgeon and holistic medicine expert Anthony Youn, MD counts hydrating and antioxidant properties as other CBD perks. “Hemp oils provide good hydration for the hair, hair follicles and scalp; the antioxidants fight free radicals and reduce inflammation and oxidation,” Dr. Youn explains. Dr. Lin says some of his patients with “dry and/or frizzy hair like CBD shampoos and hair oils” for the hydrating factor, but he sees these products being most useful for treating dandruff and itchy, flaky scalp.

Ashley Lewis, cofounder of CBD e-tailer Fleur Marché, says hemp oil may help those who braid or pull their hair consistently and have sore, itchy scalps. “Anecdotally, users have reported a soothing effect on an inflamed scalp, and this seems consistent with the benefits of CBD that have been more widely studied for skin care.”

According to Dr. Lin, hemp-based hair care is generally safe and suitable for everyone, but “always read the ingredient label, as many of these products also contain essential oils that may be sensitizing for some.”

THE HAIR GROWTH DEBATE

One of the more hotly disputed topics is whether or not CBD can assist in growing hair and slowing thinning, which is something Wachs and other brand leaders, such as Dan Hodgdon, founder and CEO of Vegamour, advocate. “CBD helps promote scalp health in two ways: “First, it reduces inflammation around the hair follicles, and inflammation can exacerbate hair loss. Second, CBD helps promote circulation, and healthy hair growth requires healthy circulation,” explains Hodgdon. “Our GRO+ Serum features micro-encapsulated CBD, which means the molecules are small enough to penetrate deep into the scalp.”

Despite the need for more research and large-scale, peer-reviewed studies on the subject, Denver dermatologist Joel L. Cohen, MD says “we know there are CBD receptors in scalp hair follicular structures, and although we don’t yet have clear knowledge of their function upon activation, they could inhibit hair growth.” Dr. Youn agrees, but suggests that we maintain realistic expectations: “CBD is one of the hottest ingredients for skin and hair today, but as occurs with many trendy ingredients, the therapeutic claims can often be exaggerated.”

THE KIT

From soothing an itchy scalp to rejuvenating sparse strands, these are our top hemp hair helpers.

01 EMERA Nourishing CBD Scalp Therapy \$30, emerahaircare.com

02. Vegamour GRO+ Advanced Hair Serum \$58, vegamour.com

03. Lab to Beauty The Nourishing Shampoo \$46, labtobeauty.com

04. Philip B. CBD Scalp + Body Oil \$95, philipb.com

05. Hempz Seeing Is Be Leave-In Ultra Hydrating Conditioning Mist \$15, hempz.com



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