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Hair Conditioner That's Gentle on the Environment



By [Gemma Alexander](#)

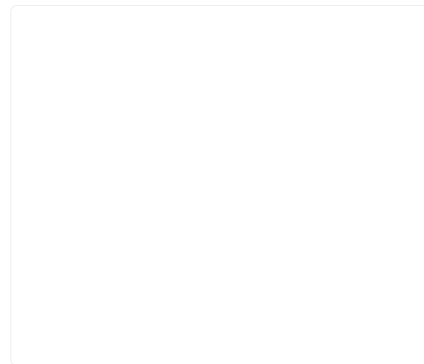
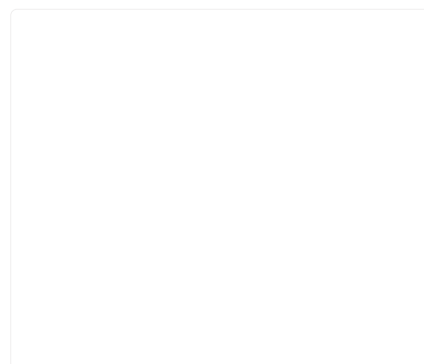
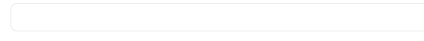
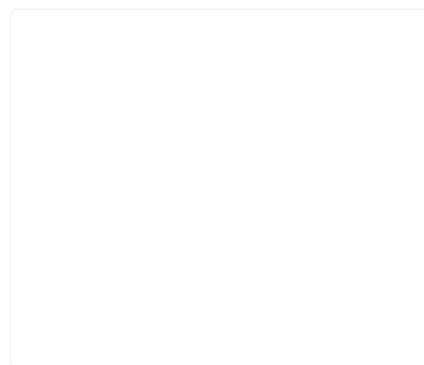
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[personal care](#)

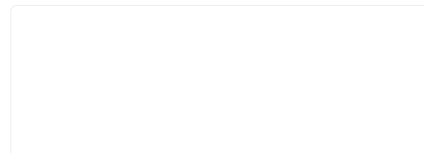


Chances are that you don't think much about which hair conditioner you use. Most people buy shampoo and conditioner together the same way they buy [clothes washers and dryers](#). We choose the same product line within the same brand for both, usually based on the product that does the cleaning. But different products serving different purposes inevitably have different environmental issues. It might be worth taking a closer look at the product you use after you wash your hair.

Why Use Conditioner?



[Westlake Home - Luxury Organic Bedding](#)



Some people may not need conditioner. [Conditioner](#) is formulated to make hair softer and feel thicker, to temporarily bind split ends, and to eliminate static caused by dryness. Harsh chemicals in shampoos are responsible for a lot of the dryness and cuticle damage that conditioner alleviates. If you maintain very short hair, damage may not appear before you cut it anyway. If you use a gentle, biodegradable [shampoo](#) that doesn't strip the oils from your hair, you might find that conditioner isn't necessary. That's the claim made by shampoo companies like [Hairstory](#) and by [no-poo](#) advocates of [DIY](#) hair care. But for most people, their hair length and/or hair texture will require conditioner to stay healthy and manageable.

A European [life cycle analysis](#) (LCA) of more than 10,000 personal care products determined that materials (ingredients), packaging, and use are the three largest (and roughly equal) components of [conditioners' environmental footprint](#).

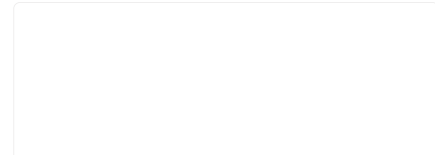
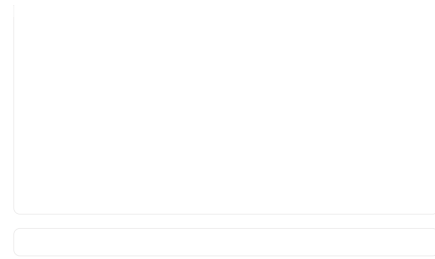
Ingredients

The raw ingredients for conditioner account for nearly a quarter of its environmental impact, with lanolin, cetyl stearyl alcohol, and propylene glycol respectively the most significant ingredients. Silicones and waxes also have significant impacts. Lanolin has a high environmental impact because it is a byproduct of animal agriculture. But from a product safety perspective, it's a desirable ingredient; it achieves the Environmental Working Group's [highest rating](#). For those who want to avoid lanolin, conditioners like [Love Beauty and Planet](#) are certified vegan, replacing lanolin and silicones with vegetable oils. [Puur Ingrid Moist Recovery](#) conditioner is not only vegan, but also EWG verified.

Despite its high environmental impact, stearyl alcohol is a safe ingredient and seems to be unavoidable in conditioners. Propylene glycol and silicones do seem to be replaceable with vegetable oils and are not listed with the ingredients of products like [Wellnesse](#) that use plant-based oils. (However, it is not clear from the LCA that plant-based alternatives like shea butter or coconut oil have smaller environmental footprints.)

Toxicity

As with most personal care products, fragrance is the source of many problematic ingredients in conditioners. Unscented conditioners like [Free & Clear](#) or [No Nothing Very Sensitive](#) are less likely to contain many of the most harmful chemicals. You can also find more natural, [safer conditioners](#) using the



Environmental Working Group Verified list.

Packaging

An average of [22% of conditioners' impact](#) comes from the packaging, which, like shampoos, is usually a plastic bottle. Depending on where you live, the plastic from shampoo bottles [might be recyclable](#) but in many places, it is not. There are some brands that use recycled plastic – even [recycled beach plastic](#) – to manufacture their shampoo and conditioner bottles. Two-in-one shampoo and conditioners like [Evereden](#) cut both product use and plastic waste in half. Using a solid two-in-one bar like [Good Cube](#) not only cuts product use in half, it eliminates plastic packaging entirely. If two-in-one products aren't suitable for your hair type, other plastic-free packaging options include [Alpine Provisions](#) and [Plaine Products](#) conditioners in aluminum bottles. Solid products like [Ethique](#) conditioner bars are both plastic-free and biodegradable.

How You Condition

No matter what conditioner you choose, remember that [use accounts for 20%](#) of conditioners' environmental impact. Most of that impact comes from the water you use for washing and rinsing. Since conditioner usually should be left on the hair for several minutes, wash and condition your hair before washing your body to keep showers shorter. Using a leave-in conditioner allows you to skip the rinse.

Whatever products you use, install a [low-flow showerhead](#) and an [efficient water heater](#) to minimize water and energy use. [Homemade dry shampoo](#) can stretch the time between washes. Using heat to style hair is damaging to the cuticle. So, simply putting away the curling iron and blow dryer can reduce the need for conditioner. (It also saves electricity). Daily detangling sprays like [Puur Ingrid Triple Treat Tonic](#) or [Clean Kids Naturally Mango](#) can also help keep hair healthy without spending as much time in the shower with conditioner in your hair.

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