

# StyLeIist

## SULFATE-FREE SHAMPOO: WHY YOU NEED TO CHECK YOUR SHAMPOO LABEL, NOW

5.24.12

It's true. For over a year now, I have been using sulfate-free shampoo. And you know what? I don't miss the original formula. At all. Why did I make this choice? My decision came mostly out of media-pressure. In recent years, a "[Sulfate-Free](#)" label has become increasingly frequent on the label of every new shampoo and conditioner. The term has become associated with being "healthier" and "organic" even when that is not the case. [Unfounded rumors](#) that sulfates in shampoo cause cancer certainly contributed to my choice, but also the promise of softer, cleaner hair by means of more natural materials was also persuasive.

But really, when I thought about these products, I had one question: What are sulfates, anyway? And are they really as bad as they sound? To answer the first question: sulfates, essentially, are what make shampoos turn into a thick lather in the shower. This ingredient, which is standard for most shampoo (and household cleaning) products, has additionally come under attack for causing [frizziness](#) (especially in [curly hair](#)) and damaging [colored hair](#). After dying your hair or receiving a chemical treatment (such as a [Keratin](#) or [Brazilian blowout](#)), salons will often [recommend a sulfate-free shampoo and conditioner](#) to maintain the style.

[Dr. Rebecca Baxt, a New York-based dermatologist](#), explained the recent bounty of sulfate-free options, "I think there are so many chemicals in our personal hygiene products, foods and environment that people have become more aware and rightly concerned about the effects of all of these chemicals. Anything with fewer chemicals has become more popular." Although she says that, "most people will not notice any difference" between sulfate-free and regular shampoo despite claims that "sulfate-free shampoos let curls stay curlier and let color treated hair stay colored longer," Dr. Baxt does, however, recommend switching to a sulfate-free formula if you have allergies, eczema or find your current shampoo irritating to the scalp.

So what can you expect from switching to a sulfate-free shampoo? A higher price tag, to start, as most drug store brands don't yet produce products without sulfates. (L'Oreal Paris, however, is an exception. The brand has released [two sulfate-free shampoos](#) since 2009 that are available for less than \$6). Perhaps the biggest adjustment to using sulfate-free shampoo is a superficial one. Without this lather-producing chemical, these shampoos have less of the over-the-top bubble that is associated with cleansing hair. But, this doesn't mean sulfate-free shampoo isn't as effective as it's mainstream counterpart. Dr. Baxt explained, "Without sulfates there is usually no "lather" or bubbles when you wash so it takes getting used to... it might not feel like it is cleansing as much but it should still clean the scalp adequately." While the benefits seem unclear, my philosophy with sulfate-free shampoo has been, "Hey, it can't hurt. Right?"