



CAN YOU WASH YOUR HAIR -- WITHOUT WASHING IT?

By Melissa Dahl
Health editor

What it is: Dry shampoo (sometimes called hair powder). There are many different brands out there; we tried [Bumble and Bumble's Hair Powder in brown](#) (\$41 for a 4.4 oz. aerosol can).

What it claims to do: Cleanse your hair without water. The powder is supposed to absorb the oils in your hair, letting you go longer between washings.

My experience: I haven't washed my hair in three days. I may not wash it tomorrow. Either way, with the dry shampoo, you'd never know the difference.



Carissa Ray / msnbc.com photo
illustration

Dry shampoo and its dirty, dirty influence on my life these last six weeks have been a little bit magical, a little bit disgusting. I have crazy, wavy hair that can take up to 40 minutes to blow-dry into submission after washing it. It's a long, sweaty, boring process, and I hate every time-wasting minute of it. All that work, and it only lasts about a day, maybe two, before I have to wash it and blow-dry it all over again. All I wanted from this stuff was to recover some of the time that my own vanity has stolen from my life over the years.

Most hair product brands have a version of [dry shampoo](#), but I tried Bumble and Bumble's because it seemed the most foolproof: It's an aerosol spray that comes in five different colors (brown, black, blond, red and white) to match your hair. (Most dry shampoos are white, loose powders that you shake onto your scalp; I knew that if I tried this, it would just look like I had a bad case of dandruff.)

I washed and blow-dried my hair on a Monday morning, and tried the hair powder for the first time the next day. Trying to follow instructions, I lifted a small section of my hair and aimed the dark brown spray at the roots, keeping the can several inches away. Then I kept the chunk of hair suspended in air for a few seconds to let it dry. After letting it fall back down, I used my fingers to shake out the excess powder flakes and brushed the rest through. Here, I took a moment to admire my handiwork. It looked *good* – my hair had so much texture and body that I hardly recognized it as my own.

And then I noticed my hands. From fingertips to palms, they were stained dark brown. It sort of looked like my misguided attempts in high school to apply a too-dark shade of self-tanner. After taking a closer look in the mirror, I saw brown splotches all around my hairline and – inexplicably – up and down my neck. On the drive to work, I kept running my hands through my hair, obsessed with its unfamiliar, stiff feel. I must have scratched my face a couple of times on the drive, too, because a glance in the mirror before stepping out of the car revealed a big brown streak on my forehead and nose. Cute.



Carissa Ray / msnbc.com photo
illustration

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At work, I drained half a bottle of Purell that had sat unused on my desk for months in a desperate attempt to keep my hands clean. But brown splotches covered everything I touched: my mouse, my desk calendar, my to-do lists and my AP stylebook. Mostly, it was embarrassing – my hands just looked really, really dirty.

The next morning, I woke to find that the gunk in my hair had stained my pillowcases. After a shower (yes, I'm still showering – I'm not *that* gross), I discovered that I had probably sprayed too much of the stuff into my hair the day before, because so much remained that all I had to do was brush it through and run a flat iron over it. I lasted through Friday using the hair powder, but at the end of the day, I was desperate to get this stuff out of my hair. My hair might have looked neat and clean, but it felt strange to the touch – stiff and product-heavy. I rinsed (and repeated) with a clarifying shampoo, watching half-amused, half-horrified as the water turned brown when it fell from my hair.

After that first week, I learned to spray less of the product at one time, and that it gives you about three or four days between washings. I was dying to get someone with hairstyling smarts on the phone. What *is* this mysterious powder?

What the expert says: It seems I may have been expecting too much from this dry shampoo stuff, says Margery Huff, a spokeswoman for the Seattle-area chain [Gene Juarez Salons and Spas](#), who often works with dry shampoos and hair powders.

“They absorb the oil in the hair. It acts like a sponge for that oil; the powder flakes absorb the oil and you either brush them out or shake them out,” Huff says. “They don’t actually clean.”

Now they tell me. She continues, “They remove excess oil but they’re not going to move any debris from pollution, or anything that’s been floating around in the air, or any excess products,” Huff says.

People with scalp conditions like eczema or [psoriasis](#) that require a strict washing schedule should avoid products like dry shampoo, she says. “It’s perfect for somebody like you that has naturally curly hair tends to be dry anyway,” Huff says.

And, as I found out the hard way, she advises that a little bit of this gunk goes a long way. And it doesn’t hurt to ask for help from your hairstylist.

“Hair powder is one of those things that takes some finessing and working with the stylist in the salon to show you exactly how to (use) it,” Huff says. “The stylist definitely can lend their expertise so you don’t end up having a black streak across your forehead.”

Bottom line: There’s a pretty steep learning curve for this stuff, but once you’ve got it down, it works. It’s like laziness in a can! When I learned how to apply this stuff correctly (less is more, people), I found it was a lot less messy, and it’s saved me a ton of time in the morning.

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