

A photograph of a woman with dark, curly hair lying back in a white salon sink. A person's hands are visible, applying product to her hair. The woman has a relaxed expression. A white text box with a teal border is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing the title "Relaxing hair".

Relaxing hair

Learning outcomes

- Maintain effective and safe methods of working when relaxing hair.
- Prepare for relaxing hair.
- Relaxing hair.

Introduction

Using a chemical relaxing product will enable you to permanently change the texture of your client's hair from excessively curly to wavy or even straight.

Relaxing hair can be beneficial to the client as it reduces the friction that is often caused by naturally curly hairs rubbing together. This friction can cause tangling, knotting and therefore subsequent breakage during brushing. Once hair is relaxed, clients can enjoy a wide choice of styles with the use of various styling tools and techniques, including tongs, rollers, wands, setting and blow drying.

A relaxer service can be either a regrowth application or a virgin hair application.

Relaxing hair



Influencing factors

The client's physical features and their lifestyle have an impact on the choice of styling. Their face and head shape may not be suitable for what they have in mind. Similarly, if their job or leisure activities affect their options, then you need to discuss these factors.

Effects of relaxer on the hair structure

The high alkalinity of the relaxer opens up the cuticle scales allowing the chemicals to enter the cortex. When active in the cortex, the hydroxides within the relaxer cream break one of the disulphide bonds - this is known as hydrolysis. It is the cross-linkages that are affected during the chemical action of a relaxing service.

Pre-treatment tests

Tools required for this treatment



Relaxer cream



Apron



Gloves



Gown



Towel



Shoulder cape



Bowl

Skin sensitivity test

Step 1

- Carry out a skin sensitivity test 48 hours prior to the service.

- Clean an area in the inner elbow or behind the ear, apply the chosen product to the area and leave to dry. A positive reaction is red skin and/or sore areas that may weep and itch. A negative reaction is no change to the skin area.

Tip:

Always follow the manufacturers' instructions as these may vary.

Consequences of not carrying out this test could result in an allergic reaction, anaphylactic shock, contact dermatitis or damage to the skin.

Sodium hydroxide is an active ingredient in relaxing products.





Elasticity test

Step 1

- Holding a few wet hairs gently between the fingers, gently pull the hair no more than 2cm (3/4 inch) and allow it to stretch.
- If the hair does not return to its original length when stretched then this means the elasticity is impaired and therefore the hair may be too weak to withstand the relaxing service.

Porosity test

Step 1

- Hold a small group of hairs upright at the tips of the hair.
- Slide your fingers towards the root area, feeling for a raised surface.

Tip:

Applying a relaxer to hair that is very porous could lead to damage as the product will be absorbed very quickly, breaking too many bonds, leading to hair breakage.

Density test

Step 1

- Take a 2.5cm²/1 inch² cross-section of the scalp and see how many hairs are growing from this area.

- If the hair is sparse, the relaxer may take rapid effect and over process. If the hair is abundant, then this will have an impact on the time taken to apply the relaxer cream.

Tip:

Avoid pulling the hair during application and preparation.

Texture test

Step 1

- Isolate individual hairs from the head and compare the diameter to that of your own or a colleague's hair.

- Thick (coarse) hair - process longer; may be more resistant to processing.

Medium hair - does not pose any special problems or concerns.

Fine hair- more fragile, easier to process and more susceptible to damage from chemical services than coarse or medium hair.

Incompatibility test

Step 1

- Coat two to three hairs in the chosen relaxer cream in a plastic bowl and process for the manufacturer's recommended development time.

- If there is deterioration of the hair sample, do not proceed with the service. Carry out some conditioning treatments in the salon and suggest other hairstyle options to the client.



Sodium relaxer application

Tools required for this treatment



Cape



Towels



Apron



Gloves



Tail comb



Tint brush



Spatula



Non-metallic bowl



Styling comb



Paddle brush



Vent brush



Hair dryer



Scalp protector



Neutralising shampoo



Timer



Plastic sectioning clips



Detangling comb



Wide-toothed comb



Relaxer cream



Waterspray

Step 1

- Detangle the hair thoroughly, first using your hands and then a wide-toothed comb.

Tip:

For regrowth applications, the client may have used irons to straighten the hair prior to an appointment. Using a waterspray, dampen a small area of the hair to determine the natural curl pattern and growth.

Step 2

- Apply the scalp protector around the nape of the neck and all around the hairline.

Step 3

- Neatly separate the hair into four sections using the plastic sectioning clips to secure the hair.

Step 4

- Using an applicator bottle, apply the scalp protector to the scalp using 0.5cm (1/4 inch) sections parting throughout the head.

Tip:

- Be careful to cause as little disturbance to the scalp as possible. Rubbing the scalp or too much disturbance can cause scalp sensitivity.
- For virgin hair applications, if the hair is very dry due to mechanical damage, you can also protect the lengths and ends.
For regrowth applications, apply a protector to all of the lengths and ends of hair that have previously been treated with relaxer. This will
- prevent damage to the hair.

Step 6

- Taking 0.5cm (1/4 inch) sections, and using a spatula or tint brush, apply the appropriate relaxer cream starting on the ends then the mid-lengths of the hair.

Tip:

- For regrowth applications, apply 0.25cm (1/8 inch) from the scalp on new growth only.
- Be careful to avoid contact with the skin, as the relaxer cream can cause damage. For the same reason, make sure that you are wearing protective gloves.

Step 7

- Repeat the application of the relaxer cream until the entire head is covered.

Tip:

- For regrowth applications, ensure the relaxer cream has been applied to the entire regrowth area.
- Ensure client comfort throughout the service.

Step 8

- Once the relaxer cream has been applied, begin gently smoothing the hair with the back of a tail comb or spatula to ensure a smooth result.

Step 9

- Continually monitor the development of your relaxing service.

- Carry out curl tests to evaluate curl reduction.

Tip:

If a wavy or texturised look is required, ensure that you are allowing sufficient curl to remain in the hair. If you require a smooth look, continue to process. Do not over straighten the hair, as this will cause the hair to become weak and potentially break.

Step 10

- Rinse the hair thoroughly with tepid water to remove all traces of the relaxer cream.

Tip:

Avoid excess water pressure or rough handling of the hair.

Step 11

- Once all traces of the relaxer cream have been rinsed, proceed with the normalising/neutralising phase by shampooing the hair with the neutralising shampoo up to three times.

Tip:

A colour indicator will help you decide when all the alkali has been removed from the hair and the hair has been restored to its acidic balance of 4.5 - 5.5.

Step 12

- Dry and trim the hair as required, then style and dress the hair to complete the look.

Applying a chemical rearranger (non-sodium)

Tools required for this treatment



Cape



Towels



Apron



Gloves



Detangling comb



Wide-toothed comb



Tail comb



Tint brush



Non-metallic bowl



Timer



Plastic sectioning clips



Hair dryer



Relaxer cream



Scalp protector



Neutralising shampoo



Step 1

- A client may have used irons to straighten the hair prior to an appointment. Using a waterspray, dampen a small area of the hair to determine the natural curl pattern and growth.

Step 2

- Shampoo the hair twice to open the cuticles, ensuring you use a sulphur-free shampoo.





Step 3

- Detangle the hair thoroughly, first using your hands and then a wide-toothed comb.
- Neatly separate the hair into two parts using a brush.

Step 4

- Apply the straightening cream – strong or mild, according to the client's hair, applying at a distance of 1cm from the root and, using a comb, proceed to the tips.
- Separate the hair into four sections as you progress around the client's head.

Tip:

Be careful to cause as little disturbance to the scalp as possible. Rubbing the scalp or too much disturbance can cause scalp sensitivity.

Step 5

- Once complete, cover the hair with a cap. If required, tie the hair with a plastic section clip.
- Leave applied for twenty minutes to complete penetration.



Step 6

- After twenty minutes completely blow dry the hair on a high heat setting, using a round brush and sectioning clips to allow easier access.

Tip:

Advise your client that heavy smoke may result from this process to reassure them. Ensure your work area is well ventilated to mitigate this.



Step 7

- Working in small sections, use flat irons on the hair at least seven to ten times to seal the cuticle.



Step 7

- Shampoo and condition the hair using a sulphur-free shampoo. Rinse the hair thoroughly and towel dry.



Step 9

- Dry and trim the hair as required.
- Style the hair to complete the look.

General tips

Problems and causes during the relaxing service

You may encounter some challenges whilst carrying out a relaxing service. Here are some of the challenges, their causes and the remedies used to counteract them.

Scalp irritation

The scalp has become sensitised during the process due to the product strength. If the client states scalp discomfort, remove the relaxer immediately using tepid water.

Discolouration of white hair

White hair can become yellowish during the service when oxidation causes the melanin to lose colour, leaving residual red and gold colours. The remedy for this would be after the normalising phase is complete; use a silver-toned styling mousse, setting lotion or conditioner to counteract the yellow.

Signs of hair breakage/loss

The curl reduction could be too extreme, application time could have been too long or formula strength too strong. If this happens, rinse directly in tepid water. Be very gentle with the hair and apply an intense reconstructing treatment.

Curl pattern remains too strong

Not enough product has been applied or insufficient curl test, or not enough bonds reduced and the application was not thorough. The remedy for this is to carry out reconstructing treatments. Once the hair is in an optimum condition, reapply the relaxer.

Trichorrhexis nodosa

A defect in the hair shaft characterised by thickening or weak points (nodes) that cause the hair to break off easily. Handle hair with care and avoid harsh brushing or excessive exposure to thermal styling tools. Carry out reconstructing treatments.

Using products without being wasteful

For successful services, you need to know the effects of different products on all hair types. There is a wide range of products available and you need to know when and why you are using these products and the amount of product that you should be using. If you are wasteful when using products, you will be 'eating into' your salon's profits.