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APRIL 2002

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healthy looks



My new house has **hard water**, and it's starting to take a toll on my hair. What can I do to get my dull, brittle locks back into shape?

FIRST, GET TO THE ROOT of the problem by seeing what you can do about the water. A water softener can reduce

the concentration of hard minerals in your water system—ones like calcium and magnesium, which make it difficult for soaps to lather up and rinse off your hair and skin. The resulting residue can leave your locks lifeless and brittle and your skin dry and irritated, says D'Anne Kleinsmith, M.D., a dermatologist in West Bloomfield, Michigan. If you don't want to invest in a whole-house system, you can install a water-softening kit under your sink or attach one to your shower head (available at hardware stores for about \$75). • Second, remove residue with a deep cleanser. We like Pantene's Pro-V Purity Clarifying Shampoo, Clinique's Exceptionally Clean Clarifying Shampoo, and Clairol's Herbal Essences Clarifying Shampoo. With hard water, conditioning is especially important. It can help soften hair and restore its luster, according to Myles Haddad, a Pantene hairstylist. You may even want to use a deep conditioner designed for weekly use.

I love headbands, but I could do without the **pinching and headaches** that accompany them. Are there any **pain-free—and fashionable—options?**



SWEEPING YOUR HAIR BACK doesn't have to be a major headache. "For the most comfort, seek out headbands without teeth—they can cause pinching—and those that have cloth or rubber on the tips to eliminate behind-the-ear aches," suggests Betsy Cantalino, owner of Classic Look Salon in Ridgewood, New Jersey. Hard plastic also tends to be painful since it doesn't conform to the shape of your head; look for some of the newer, softer styles in springy

silks, chiffons, and pale microsuedes. Wrap Star, for instance, is a long piece of fabric—available in many styles including microsuede, shantung, and Oriental brocade—attached to a hair comb. Simply secure the comb and tie the fabric comfortably under your hair in back. Other options include Frédéric Fekkai's Beauty Wrap, a silk gauze bandeau, or the Cutout Headband Tie, a full-circle band of leather with soft, leather-covered elastic in back. Both slip on your head—and stay put.



No more headaches: New bands offer style and comfort.

A friend told me that something in my body wash could cause cancer. Is this true? What are my alternatives?

SHE'S PROBABLY TALKING ABOUT sodium lauryl sulfate (SLS). "This cleansing agent is a common ingredient in shampoos, body washes, and toothpastes that helps give them their thick and foamy texture," says skin specialist David J. Goldberg, M.D., of Mount Sinai School of Medicine.

SLS has been blamed for everything from cataracts to cancer, thanks in part to e-mail rumors. But no studies have linked SLS and cancer in humans. Michael Thun, M.D., who heads the American Cancer Society's epidemiological research program, discounts SLS's negative reputation. "Some studies have shown potential for skin irritation under conditions of prolonged exposure in extremely high concentrations," Thun says. "While there's no such thing as absolute safety with any ingredient—for example, there's probably someone who's allergic to it—with normal use, a person's exposure to SLS is negligible when compared with the concentrations used to test these products."

If you're still worried, try SLS-free products at health-food stores. A few: Zia's Lavender Clary Sage Body Wash, Weleda's Plant Gel Toothpaste, and Wella's Lifetex shampoos. You'll get fewer suds, but remember that more foaminess doesn't mean more cleansing power.