



Is Your Salon Treatment Safe?

11.3.11 by Megan O'Neill

In-salon hair straightening

Is it safe? There have been plenty of reports lately about the dangers of certain hair straightening services performed in salons. Keratin-based treatments, also known as “Brazilian blowouts,” are super popular with curly girls who want sleek, shiny locks for up to three months. Unfortunately, they seem to pose a strong health risk; the process involves an application of a straightening solution, many brands of which either contain formaldehyde or a chemical that creates formaldehyde fumes when heated. Salon workers face the most severe risk, as they breathe these fumes every day, but some clients may experience dizziness, nose bleeds or blurred vision during this treatment. And prolonged exposure could potentially cause cancer, as formaldehyde is a known carcinogen.



Protect yourself: There are plenty of formaldehyde-free straightening options at the salon. Barbara Abbasi, owner of American Beauty Hair Salon in Santa Monica, Calif., recommends the Opti Smooth service from Matrix. “It doesn’t last as long as a Brazilian blowout, but it’s safer,” she says. Ask your salon about the products they use in their straightening services and, at least for now, avoid any that are keratin-based.

Manicure/pedicure

Is it safe? Nail salons are the perfect breeding ground for bacteria and fungi—all that warmth and water—so infections can and do occur. “It is most likely that shaving or other small trauma to the skin of the legs or feet, followed by submerging the feet and lower legs in pedicure bath water which is contaminated, can cause infections,” says **Houston-based dermatologist Dr. Jennifer D. Peterson**. Fungal infections, warts and even herpes can be spread through contact with dirty nail tools or pedicure foot baths. There have also been outbreaks of mycobacteria infections—which require months of antibiotic therapy before going away—after visits to nail salons. Mycobacteria is often found in tap water and can thrive in footbaths that are not regularly sanitized.

Protect yourself: When choosing a nail salon, San Diego dermatologist Dr. Susan Stuart says it’s important to consider the quality and safety of the salon before the price of their services. Ask about the cleaning protocol at your salon: Footbaths should be washed and sanitized between clients and drain filters should be removed and cleaned according to the EPA’s recommended guidelines (http://www.epa.gov/pesticides/factsheets/footspa_disinfection.htm). All tools should be sterilized between services, too, though bringing your own tools and polish is even better. You should also avoid shaving the day of a pedicure and steer clear of the salon if you have any open cuts, scrapes or bug bites on your legs or feet. Never have your cuticles cut (ask that they be pushed back only) and never allow the nail tech to use a razor on rough calluses.

Waxing

Is it safe? “Irritation and inflammation are more common after waxing, but infections can occur,” Peterson says. The bacteria that causes infections after waxing is often one that is found on the client’s skin. “This type of bacteria resides on our skin without causing infections, but in the event of a nick, cut or any disruption of the skin barrier, the bacteria can enter the skin and cause an infection,” claims Peterson. Cellulitis, folliculitis, skin abscess and viral infections are also possible. Signs of an infection include redness, swelling and pain in the waxed areas.

Protect yourself: To stop the spread of bacteria on the skin, be sure your esthetician cleanses the areas to be waxed with alcohol or benzoyl peroxide before getting to work. The spa or salon you visit should also

be licensed and employ properly trained and credentialed estheticians; licenses for each esthetician, as well as the spa itself, should be on display, and you can visit <http://www.beautyschoolsdirectory.com> to learn about your state's license requirements. Look for techs who wear gloves and use disposable spatulas that are dipped into a bowl of wax that's designated for your use only (instead of a big vat of wax that's spread over the skin of multiple clients).

Facial peel

Is it safe? "Most chemical peels administered at spas are of lower strength than those at a medspa or physician's office, and therefore are less likely to cause side effects," says Peterson. Allergic reactions are also rare but can occur even with low-grade acids. Deeper peels, if performed improperly, can cause burning, scarring, pigment changes and infections.

Protect yourself: Know how strong a spa's peel will be before agreeing to the treatment. For a deep peel, "seek the services of a medical esthetician who works in a dermatologist's practice," suggests Stuart. "You will receive the most effective and appropriate peel for your skin," in a setting where a medical professional will be on hand should anything go wrong, she adds.

Detoxifying wrap

Is it safe? Most spa body wraps are completely safe—unless you're claustrophobic! They should not be performed on women who are pregnant or who have heart or blood pressure problems as there is a potential for overheating. Seaweed wraps are also loaded with iodine that can be absorbed through the skin. "Iodine can increase sebaceous gland activity, which may lead to acne breakouts or allergic responses," says dermatologist Dr. Paul L. Hester, owner of be Medispain Lexington, Ky.

Protect yourself: If you know you're allergic to iodine or are on iodine restriction, stay away from seaweed treatments. You should also tell your esthetician if you're concerned about being confined so she can stay in the room while you're wrapped or at least be nearby to free you should you start to feel unwell during the service. Mud baths and packs are a great alternative to wraps for detoxifying the body and softening the skin.