

Splish, splash now take that bath; tips and tricks to avoid chlorine irritation

By TAKE CARE STAFF • JUN 28, 2015

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With the sun beating down during these summer months, many of us lather on some sunscreen and find relief in the nearest body of water. Pools however, often used as a shield from the sun's harmful rays, might not be as harmless as we think.

This week on "Take Care," Dr. Emmy Graber, (http://www.grabermd.com/01_biography.html) assistant professor of dermatology at the Boston University School of Medicine and Boston Medical Center, addresses chlorine and its effect on our skin and hair.



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7:38

Much like the sun's rays, chlorine (https://www.health.ny.gov/environmental/emergency/chemical_terrorism/chlorine_general.htm), a chemical which effectively kills germs and bacteria in the water, can damage both the skin and hair.

"[Chlorine] strips the surface of our skin from natural oils and as a result the skin is left feeling dry, often times it feels tighter and it gets little cracks in it," Graber said. "Just like what happens on our skin, the outer layer of each one of our hairs can become dried and cracked."

Treated or natural hair is fair game when it comes to chlorine. The chemical will dry and crack all types of hair (http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/09/health/09real.html?_r=0).

"There is something called a cuticle that's on the outer layer of each hair and it becomes roughened and damaged when it is exposed to chlorine."

Exposure to chlorine is often inevitable during the summer, which makes cleansing yourself afterwards an important step in the process.

Going to public pools (<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=128410569>), everyone is told to rinse before and after taking a plunge in the water. As tedious as this system may be (if it even happens at all), it can help prevent irritation and dryness.

"Rinsing with cool water after can be helpful," continues Graber. "Warm water tends to open up the pores and can sometimes make the irritation from the chlorine worse."

Cool water? Yes. Warm water? No. How about scrubbing the chlorine out?

"One should not scrub the body after being in the chlorine water because that's going to further irritate the surface of the skin," Graber explains.

A simple rinse in a cool shower is all that is needed to prevent too much irritation. The same method and care you use for your skin should be applied to your hair as well.

But it's not just about rinsing off. The timing is important, too. Rinse off right after getting out of the pool. Leaving the chemical on our bodies and in our hair can further extend any damages.

Graber also offered ways to prevent and block damage to skin and hair (<http://www.dummies.com/how-to/content/protecting-your-hair-and-skin-from-pool-chlorine.html>) that can be done before the initial cannonball into the pool.

"For a lot of people, especially on their elbows, knees and around their fingers, the skin will get very dry after swimming. They might want to apply Vaseline ointment on those areas before getting in the pool and that can serve as a natural barrier to the skin so it's not affected by the chlorine," suggests Graber.

Similarly, Graber explains that dampening your hair while applying conditioner, without washing it out before swimming, will coat the hair and protect the outer strands.

Although rinsing afterwards is the most important step, preventing any sort of irritation can go a long way.

When it comes to swimming, rinsing before and after that refreshing dip in the pool could be the difference between a fun-filled day or one consumed by irritation and dryness.

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