

ADORA HAIR EXTENSIONS

SHAMPOO + CONDITIONER GUIDE

The truth about sulfates, protein and caring for human-hair extensions

H A I R E X T E N S I O N S

Prepared August 2026 • Product formulas can change, so always check the bottle

The short answer

Sulfate-free is not a magic rule. A shampoo containing Sodium Laureth Sulfate (SLES) is not automatically damaging, and a sulfate-free shampoo is not automatically gentle. What matters is the complete formula, how often the hair is washed, how dry or processed the hair is, and how the shampoo is used.

For human-hair extensions, there is one extra consideration: the extension hair is no longer connected to a living root. It does not receive fresh scalp oils from a follicle, so the lengths can become dry more easily. That makes a gentle cleansing routine and a good conditioner especially important.

This guide uses that balanced approach. It does not say “all sulfates are bad” or “all protein is bad”. Instead, it explains when they can be useful, when they can become a problem, and which everyday products are sensible choices.

▢ BEST APPROACH

Gentle cleansing + good slip + moisture + careful washing + protection from heat and friction

Why this matters for Adora

The goal is not simply to find the shampoo with the fewest ingredients. The goal is to keep the extension hair soft, flexible, shiny and easy to detangle while still getting the scalp clean.

1. The sulfate-free myth

Sulfates are cleansing surfactants. SLS and SLES help water lift away oil, dirt and styling residue. They are not automatically harmful ingredients. Shampoo formulas combine surfactants, conditioners, polymers and other ingredients, so the presence of one sulfate does not tell you how the finished shampoo will behave on hair.

SLES is also not the same thing as SLS. Both are effective cleansers, but they are different ingredients. A well-formulated SLES shampoo can be perfectly usable, particularly when it is followed by a good conditioner.

So why do people prefer sulfate-free products? Because a milder cleansing system can be helpful for hair that is very dry, fragile, frequently coloured, or washed often. Less aggressive cleansing can make it easier to preserve softness and reduce that stripped, squeaky feeling.

For extensions, I would treat sulfate-free as a useful preference rather than a universal law. If an extension set is very dry, bleached, coloured or washed frequently, a sulfate-free formula is a sensible first choice. If the hair needs stronger cleansing because of buildup, a shampoo containing SLES can still have a place in the routine.

☐ SULFATE-FREE	☐ SLES/SLS CAN BE OKAY
Often a good choice for dry, delicate, colour-treated or frequently washed extension hair.	Can work well when the formula is conditioning and the hair is not becoming dry or rough.
Not automatically better. Some sulfate-free shampoos can still cleanse strongly or leave buildup.	If the hair becomes dry, tangled or rough, reduce frequency or switch to a gentler formula.

A good rule for extensions: if a shampoo cleans the scalp without leaving the lengths feeling stripped, and the conditioner restores slip and softness, the formula may be perfectly suitable.

2. Protein: useful ingredient, easy to overdo

Protein is another ingredient that gets turned into a simple “good” or “bad” rule online. The truth is more useful than that.

Hydrolyzed keratin, wheat, silk, rice, soy and other proteins can temporarily improve the feel and strength of damaged or porous hair. They can help the hair feel more supported and can reduce the rough feeling of a damaged cuticle.

The problem is repeated, protein-heavy routines. Protein is not a replacement for moisture and conditioning. If a person repeatedly uses a protein-heavy shampoo, conditioner, mask and treatment when their hair does not need that level of reinforcement, the hair can start to feel stiff, hard, dry, rough or less flexible.

This can happen with natural hair too, but it can be especially frustrating with extensions because extension hair is already cut hair with a limited ability to recover from repeated chemical, heat and mechanical stress.

Important: “protein overload” is not a formal diagnosis. A dry or stiff feeling can also come from buildup, strong cleansing, heat, chemical processing or simply a formula that does not suit the hair.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR	WHAT IT MEANS
Hydrolyzed keratin / wheat / silk / rice / soy protein	Protein ingredients. Not automatically bad, but worth noticing if several products in the routine contain them.
Glycerin, panthenol, hyaluronic acid, fatty alcohols, conditioning agents	Ingredients commonly used to support moisture, softness, slip and manageability.
Amodimethicone / dimethicone and other conditioning polymers	Can reduce friction, improve detangling and make hair feel smoother. Silicone is not automatically bad for extensions.

Adora recommendation: for an everyday extension routine, favour moisture and slip. Save stronger protein/repair products for hair that actually benefits from them, rather than making every step of the routine protein-focused.

L'Oréal Paris Elvive Hydra Hyaluronic Shampoo + Moisture Locking Conditioner

☐ BEST EVERYDAY HYDRATION

Why I like it: A practical everyday pairing for dry or dull extension lengths. The shampoo uses SLES with cocamidopropyl betaine and conditioning polymers, plus sodium hyaluronate. The conditioner contains cetearyl alcohol, glycerin, behentrimonium chloride, dimethicone, amodimethicone and sodium hyaluronate. The current South African ingredient lists do not show a hydrolyzed protein in either product.

Best for: normal-to-dry extensions, clients who want softness without a very heavy routine.

Good to know: This is a good example of why “SLES = bad” is too simplistic: this formula contains SLES but also includes conditioning and hydration-focused ingredients.

Source checked: L'Oréal Paris South Africa product pages.

L'Oréal Paris Elvive Extraordinary Oil Shampoo + Conditioner

☐ BEST FOR DRY / DULL EXTENSIONS

Why I like it: The shampoo uses SLES plus coco-betaine and conditioning ingredients, with coconut, sunflower and soybean oils and amodimethicone. The range is designed for dry hair and focuses on nourishment and smoothness. The current shampoo list does not show hydrolyzed protein.

Best for: extensions that feel dry, dull, rough or difficult to manage.

Good to know: Good example of a nourishing SLES formula. It is not sulfate-free, but it can still be a reasonable extension option when the hair tolerates it and conditioner is used properly.

Source checked: L'Oréal Paris South Africa.

OGX Coconut Miracle Oil Shampoo + Conditioner

☐ GOOD SULFATED-SURFACTANT-FREE OPTION

Why I like it: OGX states that the Coconut Miracle Oil shampoo and conditioner are formulated without sulfated surfactants. The range is aimed at dry, coarse or frizzy hair and uses coconut oil and conditioning ingredients to improve softness, smoothness and manageability.

Best for: medium-to-coarse, dry, frizzy or very thirsty extension hair.

Good to know: Because the formula is richer, very fine hair can sometimes prefer a lighter conditioner. Use mainly through the lengths and ends.

Source checked: OGX official product pages.

TRESemmé Pro Pure Micellar Moisture Shampoo + Conditioner

☐ GOOD LIGHTWEIGHT OPTION

Why I like it: The Pro Pure Micellar Moisture shampoo is listed as sulfate-free and uses cocamidopropyl betaine and sodium methyl cocoyl taurate as cleansing agents. The matching conditioner uses cetearyl alcohol and behentrimonium chloride, with coconut oil, for slip and softness.

Best for: dry, dull hair where you want a lighter-feeling routine.

Good to know: Formulas and availability can differ by country, so check the bottle sold in South Africa before making it a formal salon recommendation.

Source checked: TRESemmé product/ingredient listings.

SheaMoisture Raw Shea Butter Moisture Retention Shampoo + Restorative Conditioner

☐ RICH MOISTURE OPTION

Why I like it: The shampoo is sulfate-free and built around shea butter, argan oil, kelp, glycerin and gentle surfactants. The matching conditioner is rich in fatty alcohols, glycerin, behentrimonium chloride, shea butter, olive, castor and argan oils. The newer published conditioner formula does not list hydrolyzed protein.

Best for: very dry, coarse, textured or heavily processed hair that needs richer conditioning.

Good to know: This is a richer routine and may be too heavy for very fine extension hair. Use a small amount and focus on mid-lengths and ends.

Source checked: SheaMoisture official product pages.

Aussie Miracle Moist Shampoo + Conditioner

☐ CAN WORK, BUT MORE CLEANSING

Why I like it: This is a useful example for the sulfate discussion. Current Aussie listings show a stronger cleansing base, including SLS and/or SLES depending on the market formula, alongside conditioning ingredients and oils. It is designed for dry hair, but it is not sulfate-free.

Best for: people who like a stronger cleanse and whose extension hair remains soft after washing and conditioning.

Good to know: I would not make this the first choice for very dry, bleached or fragile extensions. If the lengths start feeling stripped or tangled, switch to a gentler formula.

Source checked: Aussie official product page and current retailer ingredient listings.

4. How to wash human-hair extensions

A good product can still perform badly if the hair is washed roughly. Technique matters.

1. DETANGLE FIRST	Gently brush from the ends upward. Do not soak a tangled set and then try to pull it apart.
2. CLEAN THE SCALP	Apply shampoo mainly to the scalp and roots. Use your fingertips, not your nails. Let the lather travel through the lengths rather than scrubbing them.
3. RINSE WELL	Rinse thoroughly with lukewarm water. Hot water and aggressive rubbing can make dry extension hair feel rougher.
4. CONDITION THE LENGTHS	Apply conditioner from the mid-lengths to the ends. Keep rich conditioner, masks and oils away from tape, bonds, beads or attachment points unless your extension method specifically allows them.
5. DRY GENTLY	Squeeze out excess water rather than twisting. Blot with a towel and detangle gently. Avoid sleeping with the extensions soaking wet.
6. PROTECT	Use heat protection before hot tools and keep heat away from attachment points. A small amount of a suitable smoothing product can reduce friction and tangling.

How often should extensions be washed?

There is no single perfect number. Wash according to scalp oil, sweat, styling-product buildup and the needs of the attachment method. Washing too often can make dry lengths harder to manage; washing too rarely can allow buildup that makes the hair dull and difficult to detangle.

Most important: if the extension manufacturer gives specific instructions for a particular tape, bond, bead or weft system, those instructions take priority.

5. Quick reference for Adora clients

HAIR FEELS...	START WITH...
Dry, dull and thirsty	Hydration or nourishing shampoo + a slippery conditioner. Elvive Hydra Hyaluronic or Extraordinary Oil are easy starting points.
Dry, coarse or frizzy	OGX Coconut Miracle Oil or SheaMoisture Raw Shea Butter for a richer routine.
Fine and easily weighed down	Use less conditioner and choose a lighter routine such as Hydra Hyaluronic or TRESemmé Pro Pure.
Stiff or straw-like after several repair products	Pause the protein-heavy products and focus on moisture, conditioning and gentle handling.
Very oily scalp but dry extensions	Clean the scalp properly, but keep shampoo concentrated at the roots. Condition only the lengths and ends.
Lots of product buildup	Occasional clarifying can be useful, but follow it with a good conditioner. Do not use clarifying shampoo every wash on fragile extension hair.

ADORA'S SIMPLE RULE

Don't choose a shampoo because the front of the bottle says “sulfate-free”, “repair” or “protein”. Read the formula, think about the condition of the hair, and choose the routine that keeps the extension lengths clean, soft, flexible and easy to detangle.

Sources & formula checks

The guide was prepared using current product and ingredient information checked in August 2026. Ingredient lists can change by market and over time, so the bottle you receive should always be treated as the final reference.

Hair/science background: Lab Muffin Beauty Science, “Sulfate-Free Shampoo? The Science” and “The Science of Hair Products: Shampoo and Conditioner”.

Product/formula sources: L'Oréal Paris South Africa (Elvive Hydra Hyaluronic and Extraordinary Oil); OGX official product pages; SheaMoisture official product pages; TRESemmé Pro Pure ingredient listing; Aussie official/retailer ingredient listings.

Important: This is general hair-care guidance, not a replacement for the care instructions supplied with a specific extension method. Tape, keratin, I-tip, weft, clip-in and other systems can have different requirements.