

Before You Leave the Chair

What to say to your stylist, what to check before you get up, and what to watch for over the next three days.

LONGEST ANY BRAID STYLE SHOULD STAY
IN
6 to 8 weeks

BRAIDS ON RELAXED HAIR VS NATURAL
HAIR
3.5x the hair loss

WOMEN WHO FELT A WARNING SIGN
FIRST
4 out of 5

What you need

- ☐ A photo of your hairline from a year ago, to compare against
- ☐ The date of your last relaxer or texturizer
- ☐ A hand mirror, so you can see the sides and the back

Say this before she starts

- 1 “Please keep the front loose. My hairline is tender.”
- 2 “I’d rather have thicker braids than smaller ones.”
- 3 “This is coming out in six weeks, so it doesn’t have to last longer.”
- 4 If your hair is relaxed or texturized, say so. It’s the biggest risk factor there is.

Ask for thicker braids, not smaller ones

This feels backwards until you think about where the weight goes. Smaller sections mean a whole braid hangs on fewer hairs, so micro braids pull harder than the same style in a bigger size. Keep the length short too, because longer hair is heavier.

Your first three nights

- 1 Wrap your hair in satin from the first night. Cotton drags on braids and roughs up your edges while you sleep.
- 2 Skip the high ponytail this week. That’s tension on top of tension.
- 3 Soreness should be fading by day two. If it’s building, or you need painkillers to sleep, go back and have it loosened.

Check before you get up

- 1 Raise your eyebrows. If your forehead barely moves, the front is too tight.
- 2 Look for tenting, where your skin lifts with the braid instead of lying flat. That is a lot of pull on very few hairs.
- 3 Feel along your hairline for small hard bumps. Those are inflamed follicles, and they mean the braids went in too tight.
- 4 Ask her to redo anything that stings. That’s a normal thing to ask.

Considerations

- If your hairstyle hurts, it’s too tight. There’s no other reading.
- Relaxed or texturized? Braids came with about 3.5 times as much hair loss.
- Caught early this grows back completely. Left too long, it doesn’t.

Every month it stays in

- Wash your scalp rather than the braids, with shampoo you’ve watered down. Diluted shampoo rinses out; neat shampoo leaves residue you can’t reach.
- Photograph your hairline in the same light each time. Month to month you won’t notice a change, but against a photo you will.
- Pinch any white specks and slide them. If they move, that’s pulling, not dandruff.
- Rest a week or two between styles. Longer if your scalp is still sore.

