

Beauty Writing Samples

Four original articles by Manna Chibueze

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Your Hair Isn't Growing Because of the Oil — Here's What Actually Matters

Natural Hair Care · ~1,200 words · By Manna Chibueze

Let's be honest. At some point, most of us have stood in front of the mirror, jar of castor oil in hand, absolutely convinced that this time, the hair would grow. We've seen the videos. We've read the comments. 'I used this oil for 30 days and my hair grew 4 inches.' So we buy it. We apply it. We wait.

And then... nothing. Or at least, not what we expected.

If you've been oiling your hair consistently and still feel like your edges are on strike and your ends refuse to retain length — this article is for you. Because the problem probably isn't the oil. It's what you think the oil is doing.

First, Let's Talk About What Oils Actually Do

Oils do not grow hair. There. Said it.

Hair growth happens at the scalp level — inside the follicle, driven by factors like nutrition, hormones, scalp health, blood circulation, and genetics. No topical oil can reach inside a follicle and trigger growth on its own. What oils can do — and do really well — is create the conditions that allow the hair you're already growing to survive long enough to show.

Think of it this way: your hair is growing right now. Every single day, tiny strands are pushing up from your scalp. The question isn't whether it's growing. The question is whether it's retaining that growth before it breaks off at the ends.

Oils seal in moisture. They protect the hair shaft. They reduce breakage. That is how length retention happens — not through magic growth, but through protecting what's already there.

So Why Do People Swear by Castor Oil and Others?

This is a fair question. Castor oil, jamaican black castor oil (JBCO), rosemary oil — these have real, documented benefits. Just not always the ones we assume.

Castor oil is thick and humectant, meaning it helps draw and hold moisture to the scalp and strands. It also has ricinoleic acid, which has mild anti-inflammatory properties. A healthier scalp environment = less blocked follicles = potentially more active growth. That's the connection.

Rosemary oil is arguably the most scientifically interesting. A 2015 study compared it to minoxidil (yes, the hair loss treatment) for effectiveness in stimulating hair growth — and it held its own. Massaging it into the scalp, diluted in a carrier oil, has shown real promise for people with thinning or slow-growing hair.

Jogoba oil is chemically similar to the scalp's natural sebum, making it brilliant for scalp balance — especially if your scalp tends to be dry or flaky.

The oil matters. But it matters most as part of a bigger routine, not as a standalone fix.

What Actually Drives Natural Hair Growth

If you want to see real results, here's where to focus your energy:

1. Scalp Health Above Everything

A healthy scalp is the foundation of healthy hair. If your scalp is consistently itchy, flaky, congested with product buildup, or inflamed — your follicles are working in a hostile environment. Regular scalp massages (with or without oil) improve blood circulation, which delivers more nutrients to your follicles. Make this a non-negotiable part of wash day.

2. Moisture Before Seal

This is where so many naturals go wrong. You cannot oil dry hair and expect moisture. Oil and water don't mix — so when you apply oil to already-dry hair, you're sealing in dryness. Always apply your leave-in conditioner or water-based product first, then layer oil on top to lock that moisture in. This is the LOC method (Liquid, Oil, Cream) in action, and it genuinely works.

3. Protective Styling With Intention

Protective styles — braids, twists, wigs, buns — reduce manipulation and protect your ends from friction and weather. But they only help if your hair is moisturised underneath. Dry hair in a protective style is just dry hair that you can't see. Check in on it regularly.

4. Trim Strategically

Trimming does not make your hair grow faster. It removes split ends that, left unchecked, travel up the shaft and cause more breakage. Trim as needed — not on a rigid schedule, but when your ends start to feel rough or look ragged.

5. What You Eat Shows Up on Your Head

Hair is mostly made of keratin, a protein. If your diet is low in protein, iron, zinc, or biotin, your hair will tell on you. This is especially worth paying attention to if you've noticed sudden shedding or a change in hair texture. Sometimes the answer is on your plate, not in your product shelf.

How to Use Oils Correctly

Since we're keeping oils in the routine — let's use them right:

- For scalp application: dilute essential oils (like rosemary) in a carrier oil at roughly 2–3 drops per tablespoon. Apply directly to the scalp and massage for 3–5 minutes.
- For sealing: after moisturising, smooth a small amount of oil over your strands — focusing on the ends, which are the oldest and driest part of your hair.
- For pre-poo: applying oil to dry hair before shampooing can reduce the harshness of cleansing and protect the hair shaft during washing.
- Less is more: over-oiling leads to buildup, which clogs follicles and weighs hair down. A little goes a long way.

The Bottom Line

Your hair is growing. The goal is to stop letting that growth disappear before you can see it. Oils are a beautiful, useful tool in a natural hair routine — but they work best when moisture, scalp care, and protective practices are already in place.

Stop chasing the oil that will finally 'make' your hair grow. Start building the environment where it can't help but thrive.

That's the real secret.

If Your Face Is Always Shiny by Noon, Read This

Skincare Routines · ~1,100 words · By Manna Chibueze

You wash your face in the morning. Pat it dry. Do your whole routine. Step outside into that Lagos heat — or Abuja, or Port Harcourt, take your pick — and by the time you get to where you're going, your forehead looks like it's been polished.

If this is your life, first of all: you're not alone. Oily skin is extremely common in Nigeria, partly because of our climate and partly because of genetics. But the bigger issue is that a lot of the skincare advice floating around was not written with us in mind. Products that 'control oil' in a temperate climate are not necessarily going to survive a humid 32-degree afternoon on the mainland.

So let's talk about what actually works.

Why Is Your Skin So Oily?

Before we fix it, it helps to understand it. Your skin produces oil (called sebum) through glands beneath the surface. Sebum is actually protective — it keeps the skin barrier intact and prevents moisture loss. The problem is when those glands produce too much, and they tend to overproduce when:

- Your skin is dehydrated (yes, oily skin can be dehydrated — more on that in a moment)
- You're using products that strip your skin barrier
- Hormones are fluctuating
- You're in a hot, humid environment
- You're under stress

The most common mistake people with oily skin make is trying to eliminate the oil entirely — using harsh cleansers, skipping moisturiser, over-exfoliating. All of this tells your skin it's under attack, and it responds by producing more sebum to compensate. It becomes a frustrating cycle.

The Simple Routine That Actually Helps

You don't need ten steps. You need four good ones, done consistently.

Step 1: A Gentle, Non-Stripping Cleanser

This is where most people go wrong. Oily skin does not need a cleanser that squeaks and leaves your face feeling tight. That 'clean' feeling is your skin barrier being stripped. Look for a gel or foaming cleanser that removes dirt and excess oil without drying you out. Fragrance-free is your friend. Wash twice a day — morning and night — not more.

Step 2: A Lightweight, Water-Based Moisturiser

Yes, you need to moisturise. Non-negotiable. When your skin is properly hydrated, it has less reason to overproduce oil. Skip anything heavy, greasy, or cream-based. Gel moisturisers or water-based formulas absorb quickly and won't sit on top of your skin. Look for ingredients like hyaluronic acid, niacinamide, or aloe vera — all of them work beautifully on oily and acne-prone skin.

Niacinamide deserves its own mention. It regulates sebum production, reduces the appearance of pores, fades post-acne dark spots, and strengthens the skin barrier. If you have oily, acne-prone Nigerian skin, niacinamide is practically made for you.

Step 3: Sunscreen (Yes, Every Morning)

We'll do a full article on this, but for now: oily skin needs SPF too. The good news is that there are sunscreens formulated specifically for oily skin — lightweight, matte-finish, non-comedogenic (meaning they won't clog your pores). This step is not optional if you're also trying to deal with hyperpigmentation and dark spots, which is a very common concern for melanin-rich skin.

Step 4: A Targeted Treatment (Only If You Need It)

If you're dealing with active breakouts, adding a targeted treatment after cleansing can help. Salicylic acid (BHA) is excellent — it's oil-soluble, meaning it can get into the pore and clear out congestion from the inside. Use it 2–3 times a week, not every day, especially when starting out.

What to Avoid

- **Over-washing:** More than twice a day strips your barrier and triggers more oil production.
- **Heavy, occlusive creams:** Shea butter, coconut oil, and thick petroleum-based products can clog pores on acne-prone skin. Save them for your body.
- **Alcohol-heavy toners:** A lot of 'mattifying' toners are mostly alcohol. They dry the skin out harshly and create that rebound oiliness.
- **Skipping moisturiser because your skin is 'already oily':** Dehydrated oily skin is a real and miserable condition. Moisturise.
- **Touching your face constantly:** Transfers bacteria and oil from your hands. Easier said than done, but worth being conscious of.

One More Thing About Our Climate

Living in Nigeria means your skincare needs to work in heat and humidity. Layering three serums and a thick cream might look beautiful on a skincare influencer in London, but on a humid Lagos morning it's going to pill, sweat off, or sit on your skin looking like grease. Keep your routine simple and lightweight. Let each product absorb before adding the next. A blotting paper in your bag for midday touch-ups is entirely acceptable and not a failure of your routine.

The Takeaway

Oily skin is not a problem to be eliminated. It's a skin type to be managed — gently, consistently, and with the right products. A simple four-step routine, built around hydration and barrier support rather than stripping and drying, will do more for your skin than any ten-step system that wasn't designed for you.

Your skin is doing its job. Help it do it better.

Yes, You Need Sunscreen. No, It Won't Leave You Ashy.

Sun Protection · ~1,100 words · By Manna Chibueze

There are a few skincare conversations that still feel like pulling teeth in Nigerian beauty spaces, and sunscreen is top of the list. The resistance is real — 'I'm already dark, what is the sun going to do to me?' or 'These sunscreens leave a white cast, I look like a ghost.' Both are valid complaints. Neither means you should skip SPF.

Let's go through this properly.

Why Dark Skin Still Needs Sun Protection

Melanin is protective. That's true. It acts as a natural shield against some UV radiation, and yes — darker skin tones are less likely to sunburn in the way that lighter skin does. But 'less likely to burn' is not the same as 'immune to sun damage.'

Here's what the sun actually does to melanin-rich skin:

- **Hyperpigmentation:** This is the big one. UV exposure triggers melanin production — which is how you tan, but it's also how dark spots and uneven skin tone develop and worsen. If you're already dealing with post-acne marks or patchy discolouration, the sun is actively working against you every time you step outside without protection.
- **Premature ageing:** UV radiation breaks down collagen and elastin over time. This shows up as fine lines, loss of firmness, and dullness. Dark skin ages beautifully — but unprotected sun exposure speeds up the process.
- **Skin cancer:** Rarer in darker skin tones, yes — but not impossible, and often diagnosed later because of the assumption that it 'can't happen.' Melanoma in Black and brown people tends to appear in less obvious places (palms, soles, under nails) and is frequently caught at more advanced stages.

Sunscreen is not a whitening product. It is not a Western beauty trend. It is basic skin protection — and your skin deserves it regardless of how much melanin it contains.

The White Cast Problem — And How It's Being Solved

This is a legitimate issue and we should name it clearly. Traditional sunscreens — particularly those using zinc oxide or titanium dioxide (called physical or mineral sunscreens) — were formulated without darker skin tones in mind. They leave a white or greyish cast that looks chalky and unappealing on brown skin.

The good news is that the beauty industry has been forced to catch up, and there are now much better options:

- **Chemical sunscreens** absorb UV radiation rather than reflecting it, so they don't leave a white cast. Ingredients like avobenzone, octinoxate, or homosalate are the ones to look for. They tend to sit lighter on the skin and work well under makeup.
- **Tinted mineral sunscreens** use iron oxides alongside SPF filters to neutralise the white cast while also providing some coverage. These are a great option if you prefer mineral formulas.
- **Hybrid sunscreens** combine both physical and chemical filters, often with a more skin-neutral finish.

You may need to try a few before you find one that works for your skin tone and texture. That's normal. Don't let one bad experience with a chalky formula become a reason to avoid SPF entirely.

What SPF Number Do You Actually Need?

SPF 30 is the minimum recommended by dermatologists for daily use. It blocks about 97% of UVB rays. SPF 50 blocks about 98%. The difference sounds small, but if you're dealing with active hyperpigmentation or spending significant time outdoors, SPF 50 gives you that extra buffer.

More important than the number is how you apply it:

- Use enough — about a finger's length for the face and neck combined
- Apply it as the last step of your morning skincare routine, before makeup
- Reapply every two hours if you're outside for extended periods

A sunscreen you actually enjoy using and will apply consistently is better than a 'perfect' SPF 80 that sits unused in your cabinet.

What About Indoors?

UVA rays — the ones responsible for ageing and pigmentation — penetrate glass. If you work near a window, sit by one at home, or spend time in a car during the day, you're still getting UV exposure. Applying sunscreen every morning, regardless of whether you plan to go outside, is a habit worth building.

Sunscreen and Dark Spots — A Partnership

If there's one thing you take from this article, let it be this: if you are actively trying to fade dark spots or even out your skin tone — whether using niacinamide, vitamin C, or any brightening product — sunscreen is non-negotiable. Those actives work by slowing down melanin overproduction. Every time you step outside without SPF, the sun is triggering more of it. You are essentially running in the opposite direction of your own skincare goals.

Sunscreen is not the last step of your routine. It's what makes every other step worth doing.

A Simple Rule

If it's daytime and you're alive — wear sunscreen. That's it. The rest is details.

Your skin is worth protecting. All of it.

Retinol Burned My Face — Because Nobody Told Me These 5 Things

Skincare Actives · ~1,200 words · By Manna Chibueze

The first time I used retinol, I was excited. I'd seen the before-and-afters. I'd read about it being the gold standard of anti-ageing, the ingredient dermatologists swear by, the thing that would finally deal with the dark spots and uneven texture I'd been fighting for years. I bought a bottle, applied it like a regular moisturiser, and went to bed feeling like I was finally doing serious skincare.

By day three, my face was peeling. By day five, it was red, tight, and burning when I washed it. By day seven, I had stopped using it entirely and was nursing my skin back to health with nothing but water and the gentlest thing I could find.

I had done everything wrong. Not because I was careless, but because nobody had told me the rules. So here they are.

First — What Is Retinol and Why Does Everyone Talk About It?

Retinol is a derivative of Vitamin A. It works by speeding up cell turnover — essentially telling your skin to shed old, damaged cells faster and replace them with new ones. Over time, this process reduces fine lines and wrinkles, fades hyperpigmentation and dark spots, unclogs pores, and improves overall skin texture and radiance.

It is one of the most well-researched skincare ingredients in existence. The results are real. But because it accelerates a natural process, it also comes with a transition period — commonly called the 'purge' or 'retinol uglies' — where your skin reacts before it improves.

Most people who 'couldn't tolerate retinol' didn't have skin that couldn't handle it. They had skin that wasn't introduced to it properly. There's a difference.

The 5 Things Nobody Told Me

1. Start Low and Go Slow

Retinol comes in different concentrations — usually ranging from 0.025% all the way up to 1% (and prescription versions go higher). If you've never used it before, starting at 0.5% or 1% because 'stronger is better' is how you end up with a burned, peeling face like I did.

Start at the lowest concentration you can find — 0.025% or 0.05%. Your skin needs time to build tolerance. You can always increase strength later. You cannot un-irritate already irritated skin.

2. Use It at Night — Only

Retinol degrades in sunlight, which makes it less effective when applied in the morning. More importantly, it makes your skin more sensitive to UV radiation. Using retinol without applying sunscreen religiously is one of the fastest ways to undo everything you're trying to achieve. Night application only, and SPF every single morning without exception.

3. Start Twice a Week, Not Every Night

Your skin needs time to adjust. When I used retinol every night from the start, I overwhelmed my skin barrier before it had any chance to adapt. Begin with twice a week — say, Monday and Thursday. After four to six

weeks with no significant irritation, move to three times a week. Eventually, many people work up to nightly use. But that's a months-long process, not a week-long one.

4. Apply It to Dry Skin — Completely Dry

This one is subtle but important. Applying retinol to damp skin significantly increases absorption and, with it, irritation. After cleansing, wait a full ten to fifteen minutes before applying. Your skin should be completely dry. Some people even apply a thin layer of moisturiser first (called 'buffering') to slow absorption further — this is a great technique for very sensitive skin.

5. Don't Mix It With the Wrong Things

Retinol does not play well with every ingredient. Using it alongside other strong actives can cause serious irritation:

- **Avoid using retinol with AHAs/BHAs (glycolic acid, salicylic acid)** on the same night. These are all exfoliating actives — combining them is too much for most skin barriers.
- **Avoid using retinol with vitamin C** in the same routine. They work better separately — vitamin C in the morning, retinol at night.
- **Benzoyl peroxide can deactivate retinol** and cause irritation when used together. Use them on different nights.

What retinol does pair well with: hyaluronic acid (to maintain hydration), peptides, ceramides, and soothing ingredients like centella asiatica or niacinamide.

What to Expect in the First Few Weeks

Even when you introduce retinol correctly, some adjustment is normal:

- Mild dryness or flaking, especially around the nose, mouth, and forehead — the areas where skin is thinner
- Slight tingling or warmth when applying (this should be mild, not burning)
- A temporary increase in breakouts as your skin purges congestion from within the pore

These are signs that the ingredient is working and your skin is adjusting. They typically peak around weeks two to four and then settle. If you're experiencing burning, severe redness, or open irritation — that's not normal adjustment, that's damage. Pull back immediately, give your skin time to recover, and restart at a lower frequency.

Is Retinol Right for Dark Skin?

Yes — with care. The concern sometimes raised is that the irritation from retinol can cause post-inflammatory hyperpigmentation (PIH) in darker skin tones, meaning that if your skin gets inflamed during the adjustment period, it can leave dark marks. This is real.

The way you prevent it is the same as everything above: start low, go slow, do not push through significant irritation, and wear your sunscreen. Used correctly, retinol is one of the best ingredients available for fading the dark spots and uneven tone that melanin-rich skin is particularly prone to. The risk is in misuse, not in the ingredient itself.

The Honest Summary

Retinol works. It has decades of research behind it and genuinely delivers on its promises — better texture, fewer dark spots, clearer pores, more even skin tone over time. But it asks something of you: patience.

You cannot rush it. You cannot use it aggressively and expect your skin to cooperate. The people who have the best results with retinol are not the ones who started with the strongest formula — they're the ones who started slow, stayed consistent, and let the process happen on the skin's timeline, not theirs.

My skin is better for it now. I just wish someone had told me all of this before I started.

Consider this that conversation.