

# The Complete Guide to Growing Out Kinky, 4B/4C Natural Hair



# INTRODUCTION

At [BlackGirlLongHair.com](http://BlackGirlLongHair.com), we feel that 4B/4C hair gets a bad rap! It is the most versatile hair texture, and can hold elaborate styles with ease, but the misconception is that it is difficult, unmanageable and cannot grow. In this e-book we hope to dispel those myths!

We've compiled our most popular and insightful articles about growing out kinky textured natural hair to create a thorough guide for 4B/4C naturals – whether you're just starting out with a TWA (teeny weeny afro), stuck at medium length, or trying to get those last few inches to bra strap length.

For the purposes of this e-book, we will use [NaturallyCurly.com](http://NaturallyCurly.com)'s description of 4B/4C hair as

- Kinky, or very tightly curled
- Very wiry, very tightly coiled and very, very fragile
- Type 4 hair has fewer cuticle layers than any other hair type, which means that it has less natural protection from the damage you inflict by combing, brushing, curling, blow-drying and straightening it
- Type 4 hair is known to shrink up to 75% of the actual hair length



*An example of 4B/4C hair*

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# HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE TO GROW OUT NATURAL HAIR?

By Audrey Davis Sivasothy

This question, and the many variations of it, is one of the most frequently asked hair questions I get. Unfortunately, it is also one of the toughest questions to answer. Many factors determine the length of time it takes for a person to grow out their hair and reach certain hair lengths. This article will try to offer some guidance for length planning. As you read, bear in mind that the time estimates listed for growing out the hair in this article are just that – estimates. You'll see that by the number of “typicallys and generallys” sprinkled throughout the article. There are just so many factors that influence when hair length goals are met including genetics, your anatomical structure, and the level of care and attention you give your hair. Growing out the hair takes years of consistent, diligent care. Though many folks are interested in achieving longer hair lengths, they do not realize the significant time investment that is involved in growing hair. Unrealistic goals and magical creams and potions that promise faster growth results but fall short on the promises make it easy to become discouraged. The only tried and true method for growing out the hair is good old-fashioned time. Never fails!

## General considerations

Hair grows approximately ½ inch per month, for a total of six inches in one year. This rate is an average across races. Asian hair grows slightly faster than this average, Caucasian hair grows near the average, and black hair tends to grow at or just below this average each month. Genetics will also influence how close to the average ½ inch you get each month. Ultimately, the estimated time length for growing out the hair and reaching any hair length goal depends on two main factors: an individual's hair growth rate and their retention ability. A faster hair grower will always reach their goals sooner than a slower grower if the retention rates are the same. A slower grower will reach their goals consistently over a faster grower who poorly retains their length. I often hear ladies say, “My hair is not growing, no matter what I do” – and for chemically relaxed ladies in particular we see that this is not true every 8 to 10 weeks when they are going in to have their relaxer retouched! Your hair is ALWAYS growing – retention may be the issue.

## The typical process

Growing out natural hair tends to follow a certain path. Generally changes in the look, thickness, and feel of the hair come first. Usually it is within the first 3 to 4 months of your hair journey that you'll notice these improvements in thickness, and this tends to happen before you ever see any additional length. The big difference in length usually happens around 6 to 8 months into the journey provided you have been diligent with your hair care.

The timetable below is one that is suggested by the literature, but my personal hair growing experience has been different with personal setbacks, style changes, and trims all throughout my journey. Be forewarned, it is a very generalized timetable and not something you should feel compelled to follow to the letter. I certainly have strayed from the mark! Please note that this timetable is so open to interpretation that I almost hesitate to post it here, but some may find it useful!

## Timetable

- **Shoulder Length:** In general, assuming that you are starting from a fresh, bald shave it should take you about 2 to 2 ½ years to reach shoulder length with great hair care.
- **Armpit Length:** Between shoulder length and bra strap length lies another popular length in the hair forum world known as “armpit length” (APL). This is the imaginary line where the arm meets the back (armpit). From shoulder length, APL could be anywhere from 6 to 15 months away – obviously depending on individual trim rates and retention.
- **Bra strap Length:** About 9 months to 18 months from there, you can expect to reach bra strap length (BSL). This is the length along your back where the bottom strap of your bra rests.\* This length is typically 3 years out from a clean shave.
- **Mid-back/Waist Length:** From a clean shave, it will take you about 3 to 4+ years of healthy hair care to reach mid-back length (between bra strap and waist length), and possibly another 6 months to a year to reach waist length considering the length of your torso/back and any trims you may do along the way.

This is the general schedule that I have in mind when I’m thinking about growing out hair. Keep in mind that these measurements are all mathematical and based on ½ inch a month growth and average height. If your growth rate is slightly slower than average, and you are a taller person, these estimates will be different than someone who is shorter, but has a faster than average ½ a month growth. Trimming takes the estimates to an entirely different dimension so there is a lot of wiggle room here. The bottom line is that it takes years to reach beyond shoulder length.

Growing out black hair is basically a commitment to care. You almost have to look at it as an investment in your hair. Though some of the health returns are immediate (shine, thickness, strength), the length returns may be several years off. If you are aggressively trimming, experimenting with colors/styles, or have setbacks along the way, of course it will take much longer for you to reach your different goals. If it is taking you longer to meet your goals, do not be too hard on yourself. Consider re-vamping your regimen or changing a few products or techniques. And don’t, don’t, don’t compare your progress to others no matter how tempting it might be. That is a surefire way to throw in the towel and give up! We are all different and our paths to whichever hair goals we have will vary.

## A word of encouragement

Sometimes change is hard to see. The problem is that we are faced with our hair everyday. You know how when someone has a baby and you don’t see the baby for a few months and then BAM the kid is practically graduating from college the next time you run into them?! Hair is like that too. I’ve run into many ladies that say, *“I’ve been at this for a few months now. I’ve changed everything! But I don’t see very much growth. I am about to quit!”* The problem with this thinking is that whether you quit or not, time is still going to continue to move right along. You are going to have to pass that time anyway! Six months, 12 months. . . healthy hair care or not! Wouldn’t you rather be 6 months down the line knowing that you’ve done all you can to improve your hair than 6 months down the line with hair that is in the same condition it was before you started caring for it? Don’t give up!

\*Note about BSL: Others have suggested that this length be measured using an imaginary line at the height of the nipples and around across the back. Others suggest that it should be measured at the bottom of the shoulder blades.

# ESSENTIALS FOR GROWING OUT 4B/4C HAIR

## Promoting Growth from the Inside Out: Diet and Lifestyle Changes that Make a Difference

By Chinwe

In the world of black hair care, optimal hair growth has become synonymous with the application of growth aids and the popping of supplements. The reality is that it normally does not require such extremes. In many cases, achieving optimal hair growth can be as simple as following the steps below:

### 1. Maintain a clean scalp

After genetics and diet, maintaining a clean scalp is probably one of the most important factors in achieving your maximum hair growth potential. A filthy scalp is more prone to fungal and bacterial infections that may adversely affect the follicle — the area where hair growth begins. Pollutants, product buildup, sweat, and dead skin cells can contribute to the filth. A regular wash routine will help to remove these from the scalp.

### 2. See a doctor regularly

Certain medical conditions can be the root of slow hair growth, but you may not know for sure until you visit a doctor. These conditions include iron deficiency anemia, folic acid deficiency anemia, vitamin B-12 deficiency anemia, hypothyroidism, and different forms of alopecia. Mild forms of these conditions can go unnoticed and undiagnosed, yet affect the hair. Stay on top of your annual physicals and doctor visits!

### 3. Exercise regularly

Exercise increases blood circulation in certain sections of the body, including the scalp. Increased blood circulation in this region may allow for more nutrients to reach the follicles. The more these follicles are fed, the more they flourish.

### 4. Massage with an essential oil and carrier oil

*DISCLAIMER: Essential oils are very potent. Please consult your doctor before using them, especially if you are pregnant, breastfeeding, or have a medical condition.*

The speculated cause of alopecia areata is an attack on the hair cells by the immune system. Some believe that stress may aggravate the condition. According to the results of one study, daily massaging of the scalp with an essential oil mixture proved effective in treating alopecia

areata when compared to massaging with carrier oils alone. The reason for the improvement in hair growth is unclear; perhaps aromatherapy is beneficial in reducing stress?

For the time being, aromatherapy as a hair loss treatment remains a debatable topic in the research community. It couldn't hurt, however, to incorporate it into your hair care regimen and perform your own personal study (assuming you've heeded the disclaimer).

## **5. Drink your water**

Water carries necessary nutrients to various parts of the body – including the follicles. Without it, achieving optimal hair growth is next to impossible. Be sure your body is absorbing sufficient water, whether via fruits and vegetables or drinking water directly.

## **6. Eat hair foods**

Because healthy, growing hair starts from within, a diet containing hair foods is key. According to doctors on WebMD, these foods include salmon, nuts, poultry, beans, and eggs for protein; dark green vegetables for vitamins A and C; whole grains for zinc, iron, and B vitamins; and carrots for beta carotene, just to name a few. Many of us worry about the external (i.e. what products to apply to our hair) and forget about the internal (i.e. what to eat for our hair). No matter what topical product we use, if we are not on our 'A game' on the inside, we will not achieve optimal hair growth on the outside.

## **7. Get adequate sleep**

Sleep is an opportunity for the body to recuperate from a day's worth of activities and stress. Without this resting process our bodies — including our hair — suffer. According to some researchers, losing sleep for even part of one night can trigger the key cellular pathway that produces tissue-damaging inflammation. In other words, insufficient sleep can be detrimental to your health. What does this mean for hair growth? Well, healthy growing hair begins with a healthy lifestyle, and adequate sleep is a part of that lifestyle.

## **8. Take your multivitamins**

Did you know that canned vegetables and fruits contain fewer vitamins than fresh ones? Did you know that boiled, steamed, and microwaved vegetables contain fewer nutrients than raw ones? The same is true for certain meats and dairy products. Therefore it is possible that some of us are not absorbing sufficient nutrients from the "healthy" foods we do eat. With that being said, be sure to purchase and prepare your food for optimal nutrient absorption, or at the very least, invest in a good multivitamin to pick up the slack.

# Ruling Out Medical Reasons For Slow/No Hair Growth

By JC of [The Natural Haven Bloom](#)

Hair products and good management techniques are the two main factors that most naturals look at to gain length. We do often talk about having a healthy diet and exercising, but less attention is paid to reasons why hair may be growing slower than normal or shedding faster than it should. Here are 5 medical causes that could perturb hair growth cycles.

## **1. Taking supplements that you do not need**

There is a school of thought that if you take certain vitamin or mineral supplements, you can promote hair growth or thicken hair. Some people self prescribe larger than normal doses of these supplements. In actual fact, taking supplements in excess or those that you do not need may lead to hair loss (*Clin Exp Dermatol, pp 396-404, 2002*). If you truly believe you are lacking in vital minerals or vitamins, it is definitely worth having some blood work done before you start on a course of supplements.

## **2. Underactive thyroid**

If your thyroid is underactive, you are likely to suffer from increased hair shedding as the balance between the hair that should be growing (anagen phase) and hair that should be shedding (telogen phase) is disturbed (*Arch Dermatol, pp 349-352, 1972*). In essence, hair that should still be in the growth phase somehow switches to the shedding phase. It is not known scientifically why this happens. The observations, however, so far are that hair follicles do have attachment areas for thyroid hormones and for people with an underactive thyroid, supplementing with synthetic hormones leads to a rebalancing of the hairs' anagen and telogen phase. So if you suspect an underactive thyroid, do have it checked out – it could improve your hair.

## **3. Low iron**

This is yet another case where there are more observations than explanations. The observation is that women with either low iron or anemia can experience increased hair loss. Similar to the underactive thyroid, this is due to hair that should be in the growth phase switching to the shedding phase (*Clin Exp Dermatol, pp 396-404, 2002*). Supplementing with iron allows restoration of the balance. However, hair loss in women with low iron or anemia is not universal, some women do not experience this. Additionally in some cases supplementation does not necessarily change the balance. Although the evidence is unclear, there is a link to iron supplementation improving hair quality for some women.

## **4. High levels of testosterone**

Women produce a small amount of testosterone in addition to making larger quantities of estrogen. The balance between these two hormones can affect hair growth. Estrogens are known to play a role in hair growth and are part of the reason why in pregnancy the growth

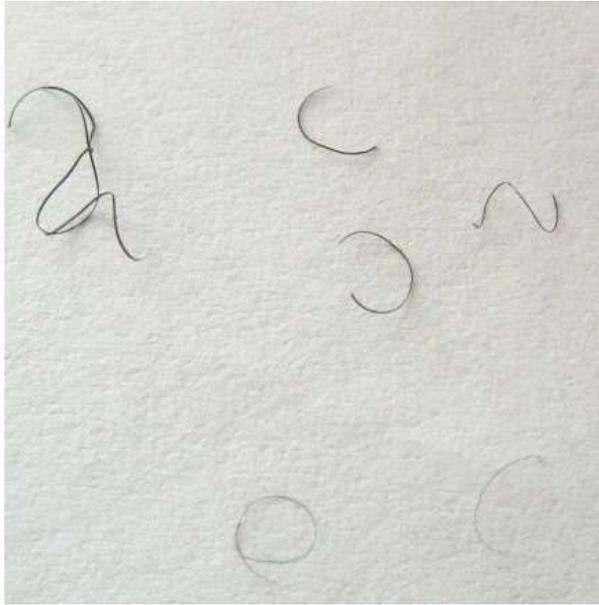
cycle of hair is elongated. For women, testosterone in higher than normal quantities can cause scalp hair to become thinner and shed more, and promote thicker hair growth in typically male areas such as the chin and chest. If you have any problems with your menstrual cycle or if you notice that your hair is thinning and shedding more, do have a hormone check.

## **5. Eating disorders**

The primary reason hair grows is because we consume food. A diet that is low in protein will generally still allow your hair to grow although it may be more brittle. A diet that excludes protein can lead to hair breakage, hair loss and slow/no hair growth (*Am J Clin Nutr*, pp 1158-1165, 1967). There is a cultural stereotype that black women in general do not really suffer from eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia but this is just a stereotype. If either of these conditions affects you, do seek medical help.

# HOW TO BREAKAGE-PROOF 4B/4C HAIR

## 4B/4C Hair and Breakage – Everything You Need to Know



By JC of [The Natural Haven Bloom](#)

In the quest to [breakage proof 4B/4C natural hair](#) many people wonder about the tiny wisps, coils or c's that break off when you handle your hair. If your hair has tight curls and is kinky, you will almost definitely have seen these tiny little bits of hair. If you have not, then try to wear a white t-shirt or cover your shoulders with a white towel the next time you are detangling. These tiny wisps are indeed a form of breakage, which can be greatly reduced but not prevented altogether. Here is why:

### **1. A small number of tiny wisps are a 'normal' feature of 4B/4C hair**

As stated in the introduction, if your hair is kinky and has tight curls, this type of breakage is a feature. You will get a few wisps simply by running your hands through your hair. The reason for this is that kinky hair is just more susceptible to this type of breakage. You can read a more detailed breakdown [here](#). If you see a few (say 10 or less) c-shaped coils when you run your hand over your hair you should not worry much, it is not serious.

### **2. Tiny wisps are problematic when they appear during dry handling (combing or styling)**

If you see a breakage collection of over 10 tiny c-shaped coils when you comb (including finger combing) or style your hair, then you should be concerned about breakage. Some common reasons for seeing multiple small c-shaped curls include

- **Over-detangling:** I seriously recommend that everyone read [Geniece's piece](#) on why some natural hair really just does not need to be detangled with a comb from root to tip. In some cases it is counterproductive and encourages your hair ends to break off.
- **Rough handling:** Please remember that no matter how gentle you think you are, your hair is the judge. Many finger combers think they are gentle by default but this is not true. If you are seeing many tiny little wisps, then you really must work with your hair in smaller sections, proceed more gently and reconsider what products you are using to make your hair pliable (sometimes oil is not enough, an additional mist of water or a little conditioner may be needed).
- **Heat use:** I still remember the days in the salon when I would have my hair blow dried and see a million little curls on the floor and thought it was normal. Of course, I also thought neck length was normal. If you see these tiny curls when using a heat tool – even at low heat – consider the fact that your hair perhaps is not suited to heat treatment.
- **Lack of moisture:** Simply dipping your hands in water and running them over your hair prior to styling can really help in terms of making your hair just pliable enough for styling without creating unnecessary shrinkage. This little bit of pliability will help to counter breakage, as the hair is able to bend and twist more easily for manipulation.

### **3. Tiny wisps also are problematic when they appear during wet handling/conditioner combing**

Water changes the balance between the pliability and strength of hair. More water means greater pliability but a matching decrease in strength allowing the hair to more easily break closer to the root when tugged. If you do see tiny wisps during wet handling or conditioner combing the likely reason is that you are repeatedly combing the same area too many times. If you have only done 2 to 3 passes and end up with breakage, consider perhaps that your hair is no longer suited to conditioner combing. You may need to try a 'drier' method, like applying undiluted conditioner on dry hair, a mix of conditioner and oil, or even just oil. If you are struggling with breakage, I do not encourage using protein treatments, as they are just a temporary fix. Find the real mechanical cause of breakage so that you can get back on track with length retention, then use a protein treatment to supplement your improved regimen.

# The Proper Way to Handle 4B/4C Hair

By Chinwe and JC of [The Natural Haven Bloom](#)

While some naturals dislike the hair typing system, it does have its benefits. One of those benefits, I think, is determining certain hair care practices that are most beneficial to tight 4B/4C coils and kinks. Here are just a few of those practices:

## **1. Detangle BEFORE washing**

The worst mistake people make, especially after long-term protective styling, is not detangling hair before washing. This simple step eliminates tangling that could be produced by hair shrinkage during washing. Don't assume that detangling with conditioner post-wash will be easier because it almost never is. It will generally be less hassle to undo large tangles and meshing prior to getting your hair soaking wet. I do accept that detangling is not always possible though; for example if you are washing twists or braids that you have no intention of undoing.

## **2. Apply oil before you shampoo**

I have seen some really complicated hair routines on natural hair forums and blogs. This often leads people to dismiss things that are seen as extra work such as a pre-shampoo (or pre-poo). However, this is the simplest pre-poo step ever! Apply some oil to your hair the night before your wash...that is it! You can choose a penetrating oil like [coconut oil](#) for greatest effect but any natural oil is fine (silicone and mineral oils are the least useful for this purpose). This simple step will help protect the moisture levels in your hair and guard against breakage. The effect of this step is usually immediately noticeable.

## **3. Wash in sections**

Because our hair type has a tendency to shrink and tangle easily, washing in sections is ideal for retaining length. Whether you section your hair in big braids, big twists, or via hair clips/holders, keeping the hair stretched and bound will help to prevent detangling nightmares and breakage.

## **4. Dry your hair BEFORE you apply conditioner**

It is common to shampoo and rinse hair then gently squeeze out the water before applying conditioner. My advice is to take the time to actually dry your hair (*using an old t-shirt or [microfiber towel](#) if you are in the know!*) before you apply the conditioner. If you apply conditioner and it immediately starts dripping your hair is too wet and it is possible that your hair conditioner is being diluted. To get the most from your conditioner, apply to damp instead of soaking wet hair. This simple step leads to greater softness, better moisture and strength for your hair.

## **5. Keep your hair in stretched hairstyles**

This tip may sound obvious to some but still warrants mentioning. Stretched styles – twist-outs, braid-outs, bantu knot outs, etc. – are good go-to styles when you want to wear your loose and free. Why? Because when our coils and kinks are stretched, they are less likely to interact with each other to form knots and tangles, which in turn decreases breakage.

## **6. Keep your hair in bound/protective styles**

Buns, twists, braids, and other bound/protective styles restrict our super coily strands from interacting with each other. Some bound styles may be more effective than others depending on your hair density and texture within the Type 4B/4C category.

## **7. Avoid harsh tools (or tools altogether) when detangling**

Wide tooth seamless combs and/or our fingers are among the gentlest tools for 4B/4C hair. The widely spread apart teeth on the comb minimize snagging and snapping during detangling. Our fingers can do the same but more effectively (when done properly). While not all brushes are terrible, I rarely (if ever) see a Type 4B/4C natural achieve long hair using any sort of brush during detangling sessions.

## **8. Try to style with your fingers (instead of brushes and combs)**

Too much combing and brushing (in addition to over-stretching the hair) can contribute to mid-shaft splits. Our kinky tresses are more prone to this kind of split, so we need to be more careful using these tools. If you *must* use a comb or brush to style your hair, keep it to a minimum. (Check out this [post](#) for more details on mid-shaft splits.)

## **9. Manipulate your hair as little as possible**

The more you manipulate your hair, the more likely you are to not only get breakage, but tangles and knots. This tip corresponds with number 6 – wearing bound styles, which restrict strands from interacting with each other for extended periods of time.

## **10. Moisturize and seal thoroughly**

Every natural can probably benefit from this tip, but it is especially important for Type 4B/4C hair. Why? Because our tight coils and kinks do not allow for as much sebum and moisture distribution as, say loose curls or straight hair. That being said, applying some moisture and sealant (a hair oil or butter) to the top, sides, and bottom of your hair is not sufficient. For some of us, separating our hair into two or three sections is not enough either. While you obviously do not have to work strand by strand, be sure to really get “in there” AND all the way down to the ends when moisturizing and sealing.

## **11. Go heat free**

Simply put, heat degrades protein which means heat degrades hair, which is made of protein. The less heat you use, the stronger your hair will be and the easier it will be to retain the

older hair. Adopting a no-heat regimen also translates to fewer split ends and less breakage. If your hair is the type that requires a lot of babying to progress, try using no heat for 6 months and see what a difference that makes. Heatless stretching methods such as braiding/unbraiding, bantu knots/knot outs, banding, African threading and [Curlformers](#) can help if you want to reduce shrinkage and tangling.

## Hair Tools that 4B/4C Naturals Should Avoid

By Chinwe

Let's be real. Not every 4B/4C natural uses just her fingers as her detangling and styling tool. Wide tooth combs and the ends of rattail combs are just a few other necessities that may be in the stash. That being said, are there certain natural hair tools that we should probably avoid? The answer is yes. Here are four of these tools:

### **1. Tangle Teezer**



This tool was (and still is) so talked about in the natural hair community that many ladies jumped on the bandwagon – including me. However, as quickly as that craze started, YouTube videos and hair care forums flooded with the talk of breakage and split ends from the Tangle Teezer. What's more, a large portion of that talk was coming from those with 4B/4C natural hair. With that, I quickly put my Tangle Teezer into hiding. It just is not designed to “teeze” our kinky “tangles” without doing a bit of damage over time.

### **2. Denman D3 or D4**



Before the Tangle Teezer bandwagon, there was the Denman D3 (and D4). I admittedly jumped on that one – for a short minute – too. Unlike the quick flood of complaints that followed after the Tangle Teezer, there was no flood after the Denman – it was more gradual and subtle. Nowadays, it's become pretty clear across the hair care boards and YouTube that the D3 and D4 are better for curl definition, which 4B/4C naturals lack. Additionally, some of us who have tried the Denman brushes complain about snagging and breakage. However, not all Denmans are created equal; there are the D31 and D41, which have wider spaces between the nylon pins and *may* be better choices... but I'm good.

### 3. Velcro Rollers



Velcro rollers work by gripping to the hair via tiny (usually nylon) loops. Now, imagine separating those tiny loops from highly textured hair once dry. While these rollers posed no real problem on my relaxed hair, I can envision them doing great damage on my 4B/4C hair. Additionally, I don't have to look far to read a few horror stories from those with my hair type who have been bold enough to use them on their natural hair. I'll pass and stick with my smooth [snap-on magnetic rollers](#).

### 4. Alligator clips



These are the metal clips with the teeth, hence the name “alligator”. Do you really want an alligator latching onto your hair? (Okay, that was a lame attempt at humor.) So, back to the alligator clips, whose teeth can easily tangle with kinks and tiny coils. They are generally used for placing the hair into sections or as part of hair accessories (example, a flower hair pin). It is probably better to go for the [smooth duckbills clips](#) (especially [plastic ones](#)) instead.

# Strengthening and Fortifying Your Ends

By Chinwe

A key component to retaining length in 4B/4C hair is ensuring that your ends are strong and healthy. If your hair is growing, but your ends are thin, scraggly, brittle, weak, and/or split, then you will lose the progress you've made. Here are six tips to get you started towards thicker, stronger ends:

## **1. Trim away split ends and other damage**

If you want to eliminate thin, brittle ends, then start first by trimming away any moderate to severe damage. Though this step may sound obvious, many of us still hold on to such damage in hopes of keeping our length OR magically reverting back to healthy ends. To put it bluntly, split ends need to be cut. Severely worn ends need to be cut. These weak points need to be removed. (*Check out this [post](#) for various ways to trim natural hair.*) After your trim, you can then really focus on achieving thicker, stronger ends using the following steps ...

## **2. Use a protein conditioner on your ends**

The use of [protein conditioners](#) tends to be underrated in the natural hair community while moisture is usually at the forefront of our minds. Though moisture is obviously necessary, protein can be beneficial in temporarily reinforcing the ends of our hair, particularly areas where the cuticle has been lost. Such reinforcement can allow for thicker, stronger ends in the immediate moment (due to temporary patching of the cuticle) as well as in the long run (due to protection against breakage and splits). *Follow up with a [moisturizing conditioner](#), if needed.*

## **3. Lubricate your ends liberally prior to manipulation**

Many naturals already know about the importance of “sealing” – application of an oil and/or butter to the ends in order to help lock in moisture. However, not as many naturals know about the importance of “lubricating” the ends, especially prior to manipulation of any sort. So why is this process useful? Well, application of an oil and/or butter to the ends can reduce friction that might otherwise cause knotting, tangling, splits, and worn ends. Thus, it can be beneficial to not only apply these substances after you moisturize but also before you style (e.g., twist your hair, bun your hair) or separate (e.g., undo twists for a twist-out, separate an old braid-out) your hair.

## **4. Keep direct heat usage to a minimum OR eliminate it altogether**

While you may not experience immediate heat damage (that is, permanently straight strands), you can accumulate an abundance of split ends with the overuse of heating tools. Thus, it is better to keep heat usage to a minimum (and that minimum varies from one natural to another) or to cut it out altogether.

## **5. Handle your ends gently AND as little as possible**

The less you handle your hair, the less wear and tear you will experience, especially at the ends. For some naturals, this means protective styling long-term while for others this means adopting a simple, low-manipulation style routine. Also, when you *are* manipulating your hair, be very gentle at the ends; tugging, pulling, and tension can lead to splits and faster wear.

## **6. Moisturize your ends sufficiently and regularly**

This last tip may seem like a no-brainer, but how many of us can be honest with ourselves about being on top of our moisture game ALL of the time ... especially when it comes to the very ends of our strands? The reality is that dry ends can transform into broken, thin ends over time, so make this tip a priority!

# Regrowing Weak Edges

By Adeola of [The Mane Captain](#)

A receding hairline or “bald edges” can really take away from a woman’s beauty. Rather than dealing with the issue, many have resorted to covering up the problem with a weave or wig, while others turn to supplements or “hair growth pills.” While those are great ways to temporarily deal with the issue, the best way to ensure that your hair grows back is to do away with the bad practices that led to the problem, and incorporate healthy hair habits into your regimen. Prevention is better than cure.

## **1. Retire the weaves and wigs**

Weaves and wigs are actually one of the causes of balding edges, especially when they’re fixed so tight that you can feel your edges being pulled. To cover up your thin edges, and if your workplace permits, I would suggest wearing a loose head wrap, or wrapping a thin scarf around your edges. If this isn’t an option for you, try looser wigs and ask your stylist to braid and sew the wig on very loosely.

## **2. Be gentle**

The hair surrounding your hairline is very sensitive and fragile. You’ll need to be extra careful with this area since the hair isn’t as resistant and tough as the mature hair all over your scalp. This means general manipulation like brushing, combing, braiding and detangling must be done with extra care.

## **3. Keep your styles loose**

Aside from wigs and extensions, tight natural hairstyles such as afro puffs, ponytails and tight pin up styles can be detrimental.

For those who like to wear headbands often, opt for looser and thicker headbands that won’t put too much stress on your edges or pull at them when taken off. You can also opt for [silk/satin head wraps](#) or headbands which easily slide on and off without creating any friction.

If you are wearing a tight style take it down after a few hours so that your edges can relax.

## **4. Keep extensions lightweight**

A lot of women like to wear tiny and heavy braids, which can be detrimental to the overall health of our hair. Heavy braids can cause edges to vanish as the tiny hair strands are uprooted. This can also affect the potential growth of new hair. Opting for lighter extensions such as Marley hair and braiding bigger chunks of hair will reduce the tension on the hair, and help to ensure that your edges are not yanked off by heavy extensions.

# 7 Steps to Minimize Damage When Using Heat on 4B/4C Hair

By Chinwe

*Note: If you can answer “yes” to any of the following questions please bypass this section and leave heat usage alone for now: Is your hair currently damaged? Is your hair brittle or weak? Is your hair newly colored or bleached?*

So far we have strongly recommended that 4B/4C naturals stay away from heat if they are trying to retain length. But applying heat does not have to be destructive if done correctly.

The truth of the matter is that heat usage does not have to be scary as long as you know your hair and its limits. Additionally, a high-moisture, high-strength, moderate-heat routine is necessary to minimize damage.

The following regimen is a good starting point for those who are ready to incorporate heat styling into their hair care routine.

## **1. Wash with a gentle or moisturizing shampoo**

With a heat-styling regimen, it is really important to maintain moisturized strands, even during the washing process. Use of a stripping, drying shampoo will translate into more effort spent afterwards restoring the moisture that was lost. On the other hand, use of a gentle shampoo will retain that moisture, and depending on the product, add more moisture and a bit of conditioning. [Gentle shampoos](#) usually contain mild (rather than harsh) cleansing agents. [Moisturizing shampoos](#) are gentle shampoos that also contain light conditioning ingredients.

## **2. Deep condition with a moisturizing protein conditioner**

Following up with a [deep protein conditioner](#) is essential to reinforce the hair shaft for manipulation and heat usage. However, for those who are protein sensitive or have issues with protein-moisture balance, finding the right deep conditioner can be a challenge. A great option is to try one with the dual role of strengthening (via protein) and moisturizing. These conditioners will generally contain a hydrolyzed protein (e.g., keratin, collagen) for reinforcement and humectants (e.g, glycerin) for moisture retention.

## **3. Quick condition with a silicone-based conditioner (optional)**

This step is ideal for those who desire strands that are more manageable (e.g., easier combing, less tangling) and smoother for heat styling. Also, if your hair is too hard after the above deep conditioning step, this quick condition may help to soften it.

## **4. Moisturize with a light water-based product and then seal**

This is your final moisturizing step prior to applying heat to your hair. You can simply apply [a good oil/butter-based sealant](#) directly to your damp, conditioned hair or after applying a light water-based moisturizer. Try to avoid products containing humectants in order to delay reversion and frizz. Also, try to avoid heavy products, which can contribute to buildup and lessen the duration of your style.

## **IF FLAT IRONING:**

### **5. Air-dry in big braids**

In order to minimize heat usage, air-dry your hair as opposed to blow-drying. Doing so in big braids will stretch the hair better than twists though it will also take longer.

### **6. Apply a silicone-based heat protectant and evenly**

A [good heat protectant](#) will usually contain silicones, such as dimethicone or cyclomethicone, which are very effective at reducing damage. Applying a heat protectant is necessary to reduce the rate at which heat travels through the hair. Be sure to apply a sufficient amount, section by section.

### **7. Flat iron using a moderate temperature and no more than two passes**

Read this [post](#) for information on the temperature profile for human hair. If you do use a setting above 300 degrees Fahrenheit, try not to go above 350 F. Also, invest in a [quality flat iron](#) so that little effort (including minimal passes) is required to achieve the look for which you are aiming. Be sure to invest in one with a temperature dial, as well, so that you can control the heat level.

## **IF BLOW-DRYING:**

### **5. Plop the hair until damp**

It is less damaging to blow-dry damp hair rather than soaking wet hair. Prior to heat usage, wrap your freshly washed hair with a towel or t-shirt for fifteen to twenty minutes. (This method of removing excess water is called plopping.) Then unwrap your hair and proceed to the next step.

### **6. Apply a silicone-based heat protectant**

A [good heat protectant](#) will usually contain silicones, such as dimethicone or cyclomethicone, which are very effective at reducing damage. Applying a heat protectant is necessary to reduce the rate at which heat travels through the hair. Be sure to apply a sufficient amount, section by section.

### **7. Blow dry using the tension method (no combs or brushes).**

View tutorials on tension blow-drying in this [post](#). This method of blow-drying is less damaging than using comb attachments or brushes, which may over-manipulate the

hair. Additionally, invest in [a blow dryer](#) with a diffuser, which will help to evenly distribute the heat across your hair.

## **HOW OFTEN?**

Alternate between your heat-styling routine and no-heat styles.

Wear your heat-styled hair for 2-3 weeks at a time and alternate with air-dried styles (e.g., twists, buns, braids, roller set). Whether you choose to wear heat-styled looks twice a year or twelve times a year is up to you. However, the lower your frequency of heat usage, the better your hair will fare in the long run.

# PRODUCTS THAT PROMOTE GROWTH

## Amazing Products for Type 4B/4C Natural Hair

By Chinwe

Not all Type 4B/4C naturals have the same head of hair, but we do have many similarities, including susceptibility to knots, prone to dryness, and detangling woes. When it comes to finding products to care for our kinks, it can be a difficult task. If you are just starting your hair care journey or are still searching for that staple product these four recommendations may be a good place to begin:

### 1. Eco Styler Gel – for slick edges



Not every Type 4B/4C natural is going to like this product, but many may find it an essential addition to their product collection. How is this gel different from most other ones? Well, it is super heavy and thick making it able to tame our edges with minimal effort. It is also non-drying and provides excellent hold. Just apply a generous amount to your hairline and nape, wrap with a scarf until dry, and remove the scarf for slicked down edges.

### 2. Shea Butter – for enhanced detangling



Because this butter is a great emollient, it can be a useful addition for many Type 4B/4C naturals for lubrication and detangling. Use it alone or mix it with oils to increase slip for dry finger detangling. If you prefer to comb detangle on damp hair, melt a little [shea butter](#) and mix with some conditioner for more slip. Either way, you will notice a smoother detangling session than usual.

### 3. [Herbal Essences Hello Hydration](#) – for quick conditioning



A lot of Type 4B/4C naturals rave about this product for producing smooth, manageable strands after washing. Other inexpensive instant conditioners do not compare in terms of popularity. The product does contain silicones, so be sure to monitor for buildup or use a shampoo that will adequately prevent such buildup.

### 4. [Castor Oil](#) – for increased sheen



Because 4B/4C strands are kinky they tend to have very little natural sheen. If you want to enhance your hair's luster try [castor oil](#). According to a study published in the Journal of Cosmetic Science, [castor oil](#) was shown to increase the luster of hair.

## 3 Oil Mixes that Boost Length Retention

By Cassandre

A myriad of hair issues can be mended with just the right oily potion. It takes a little experimenting to come up with your own ride or die, holy grail mix, but once you do it could mean a few extra inches of retained length per year.

### **For a brilliant seal**

This recipe contains some of my favorite mix of oils for shine, anti-frizz and moisture. It also has impressive occlusive properties similar to a silicone oil mix. [Castor oil](#) is a rather unique oil, containing fatty acids and similar “humectant” qualities of the well known [vegetable glycerin](#). With a base of [castor oil](#) and the oil/wax like characteristics of [jojoba](#), which mimics our own scalp’s sebum, you’re bound to experience an intense moisture, making for an amazing length retaining potion.

In a small glass bowl mix the following oils.

- 1oz [castor oil](#)
- 1 oz [jojoba oil](#)
- ½ oz [grapeseed oil](#)
- ½ oz [vegetable oil](#) (yes. Vegetable oil)

Stir until they appear to be a homogenous mix.

I use this oil mix immediately after washing my hair and follow up with a leave in. It’s done wonders keeping my hair moisturized for a good week.

### **To boost moisture retention**

[Amla oil](#) is produced from a combination of the fruit (amla aka gooseberry) and any base oil or butter. Amla’s pH is perfect for reviving your curl and helping to calm a scalp issue. Combined with ultra fatty oils it can really boost your moisture retention, which eventually spells L-E-N-G-T-H for your strands.

In a small pot, combine these ingredients on low heat.

- 4 oz [cocoa butter](#)
- 2 oz [coconut oil](#)
- 2 oz [almond oil](#)
- 2 tbs [amla powder](#) (dried amla fruit)

Stir while on low heat and remove after 15 minutes. To get a really rich infusion, leave the amla in the oil overnight or for a week. Strain the [amla powder](#) with cheesecloth.

I use amla enriched [cocoa butter](#) and [coconut oil](#) as an extra luxurious hot oil treatment. Leave it on your hair for as long as you wish. I get the best results on freshly washed or clarified hair. Check out my how to video [here](#).

## To eliminate an itchy scalp

I'm convinced that poor scalp health can halt any "long hair don't care" aspirations. This oil mix helps eliminate scalp itch, although I recommend seeing a dermatologist for persistent issues.

The base oil of this mix is [neem oil](#). [Neem oil](#) is a natural anti-fungal, anti-bacterial, anti-septic, anti-viral, and anti-bug (such as lice) remedy. It's also uber potent so if you're pregnant or trying to get pregnant consult your doctor about using it topically. When you combine this oil with [rosemary essential oil](#), you get a very powerful (albeit very stinky) oil mix for your scalp.

Combine in a glass bowl

- 2 oz [organic neem oil](#)
- 6-8 drops [rosemary essential oil](#)

[Neem](#) doesn't sting, but you should do a skin test at least 24 hours before using this mix to ensure you won't have any adverse scalp reactions. You can also dilute the [neem oil](#) with another oil (1:5 ratio). I strongly recommend diluting if you have sensitive skin.

Once you've established that you won't break out, apply just a few drops of this mix to the troubled areas on your scalp. Massage it in and let it sit for an hour. Rinse it off with a water and [apple cider vinegar](#) mix or follow up with an anti-itch or anti-dandruff shampoo.

## 3 Researched Recipes to Regrow Edges and Recover from Shedding

By Chinwe

Are you having difficulty regrowing your edges? Or maybe you are having a hard time recovering from hair loss or severe shedding? The following recipes may help. (Keep in mind that while these recipes are based on reviewed studies, they are not guaranteed solutions, especially depending on the source of your condition.)

### 1. Green Tea Spritz

#### Ingredients

- 3 mL [green tea extract](#) (ideally 80%+ EGCG)
- 20 mL distilled water

**Directions:** Mix together and store in a cool, dark place. (If using [green tea extract supplements](#), crush thoroughly before mixing into water.) Massage into scalp nightly. If preferred, you may alternatively drink green tea as part of your diet (after consulting a doctor).

**What Research Says:** I was on a hair care site years ago when I first read that green tea may enhance hair regrowth. A skeptic at first, I decided to see what research I could find on the topic. Amazingly, there are some studies that have suggested a connection between green tea and hair regrowth. Apparently, the growth is linked to the polyphenolic compounds (particularly epigallocatechin-3-gallate, or EGCG) contained in green tea. Applying green tea topically or consuming it may prove beneficial.

**Sources:** *Journal of National Medical Association*. 2005 August; Volume 97, No. 8: pp. 1165–1169.

*Phytomedicine*. 2007 Aug; Volume 14, No. 7-8;pp. 551-555.

### 2. Essential Oil Blend

#### Ingredients

- 2 drops [thyme essential oil](#)
- 3 drops [lavender essential oil](#)
- 3 drops [rosemary essential oil](#)
- 2 drops [atlas cedar/cedarwood essential oil](#)
- 3 mL [jojoba oil](#)
- 20 mL [grapeseed oil](#)

**Directions:** Mix the essential oils into the carrier oil combination ([jojoba](#) and [grapeseed](#)), and store in a cool, dark place. Massage into scalp nightly for a minimum of two minutes. To aid absorption, follow up by wrapping your head with a warm towel. (*DISCLAIMER: Essential oils are very potent. Please consult a doctor before using them, especially if you are pregnant, breastfeeding, or have a medical condition.*)

**What Research Says:** According to the results of one 1998 study, daily massaging of the scalp with an essential oil mixture showed an advantage to treating alopecia areata when compared to massaging with carrier oils alone. The reason for the improvement in hair growth is unclear – perhaps aromatherapy is beneficial to reducing stress? The speculated cause of alopecia areata is an attack on the hair cells by the immune system. Some believe that stress may aggravate the condition.

**Source:** *Archives of Dermatology*. 1998 Nov; Volume 134, No. 11: pp. 1349-1352.

### 3. Ginkgo Biloba Extract Spritz

#### Ingredients

- 14 mL [ginkgo leaf extract](#) (liquid form)
- 6 mL water (or a carrier oil)

**Directions:** Mix the ingredients together and massage into scalp nightly. If preferred, you may alternatively take [ginkgo biloba extract in supplement form](#). (*NOTE: Please consult a doctor before taking or using ginkgo leaf extract, especially if you have a blood or heart related medical condition.*)

**What Research Says:** [Ginkgo biloba extract](#) is said to mitigate poor blood circulation. It is typically used to improve memory, but has also been associated with promoting hair regrowth, according to one study.

**Source:** *Yakugaku Zasshi (Journal of the Pharmaceutical Society of Japan)*. 1993 Oct; Volume 113, No. 10: pp. 718-724.

# STYLING 4B/4C HAIR FOR GROWTH

## What is Protective Styling?

Many 4B/4C naturals utilize protective styling to retain length, because, when done right, it reduces ends breakage and split ends. Protective styling is keeping the ends of your hair bound (braids, twists) and/or tucked (buns), thereby 'protecting' them. Loose styles – where the ends are free – afros, twist outs, etc – are not considered protective.

Because 4B/4C hair is more fragile than looser hair types, many naturals of this texture find great success in keep their hair 'protected' as a means to gain length.

In the natural hair community protective styles are often looked on as 'boring', unattractive or limited. This does not have to be the case! Check out the next few sections for cute and effective protective styles for all lengths of 4B/4C hair.

## 6 Protective Styles for Short, Kinky Natural Hair

By Chinwe

Let's face it. Protective styling can be a challenge for those with shorter, natural hair ... especially kinky hair. (I remember hating the way stubby twists looked on my head after the big chop.) However, with the current rise of YouTube naturals, one can get a little more creative in terms of protective styling these days. Check out these six tutorials for inspiration:

### **1. Classy Updo with Side Flat Twist**



Now this tutorial consists of two looks; the “Day 11” look is the protective style. Start with a diagonal flat twist down one side. Slick the remaining hair into the finished updo.

[Click here](#) for the tutorial on YouTube.

### **2. Elegant Flat-Twist Updo**



This beautiful protective style will work great on low-density, kinky hair that has been stretched (via banding, twist-out, braid-out, etc). It is really simple to create and requires a few bobby pins.

[Click here](#) for the tutorial on YouTube.

### 3. Flat Twisted Faux Hawk



For you skilled flat-twisters out there, here is something new! (For those who do not know how to flat twist, try asking a friend to help you out on this one.) You essentially flat twist the sides and leave the middle section of hair free. Then you attach twisted extension hair to the middle to create a fuller faux hawk. The extension hair used in this tutorial is from [Nafy Collection](#), or you can alternatively try using Marley hair from a local beauty supply store.

[Click here](#) for the tutorial on YouTube.

**4. Simple Classic 1940s Updo** This gorgeous classic style is fairly easy to do. Start by creating a part down the middle of your head (leaving a section out in the front). Then twist or roll each section upwards with the aid of bobby pins to keep the hair intact. Finish off by styling the front into the classic pompadour! [Click here](#) for the tutorial on YouTube.

**5. Chignon with Cornrows** This is another beautiful protective style for short, kinky natural hair – especially medium to high density. You do not have to be super talented to create this look, but you do need basic cornrowing skills. [Click here](#) for the tutorial on YouTube.

**6. Easy Braided Updo** Now this tutorial is for hair that is a little longer ... more like in the awkward “in-between” stage. After parting the hair into three sections, you create a braid that zig zags down the sections. [Click here](#) for the tutorial on YouTube.

## 9 Cute Styles for Naturals in the Awkward 'In-Between' Stage

By Chinwe and JC of [The Natural Haven Bloom](#)

The “in-between” stage is infamous for being that period at which your natural hair is not exactly *super* short but also not long enough to achieve certain styles ... hence, the name “in-between”.

This stage can be hard for several reasons

- Your hair is not long enough to bun but is not a twa (teeny weeny afro) either
- You may have liked having a bang/fringe but you cannot style your hair in this way yet
- You may be bored of wearing a headband and pretty earrings as your go to style
- You may be tired of wearing a phony puff to mimic a bun
- You may not like how your hair looks in twists or braids as they may not hang as you would like them to yet

If any of these are your issues, then here are 9 styles that may help you through this stage:

### 1. Defined Straw Set



This style can be achieved with straws and your favorite setting product. Start on freshly washed wet hair.

[Click here](#) for the tutorial on YouTube.

### 2. Bubble Curl Bun



This style is done on flat-ironed natural hair but can work on hair that has been stretched via rollers, banding, or blow drying.

[Click here](#) for the tutorial on YouTube.

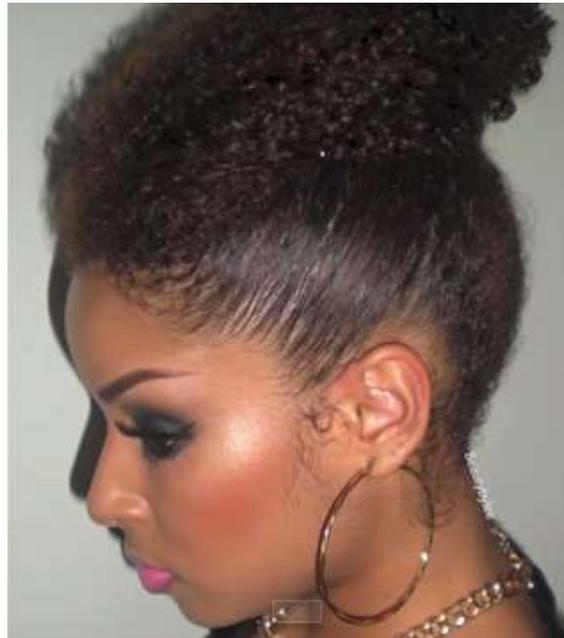
### 3. High Twisted Bun Starting From a Puff



Your hair does not need to fit into a ponytail to create this bun. Starting from a high puff, the loose hair is twisted and then morphed into a bun.

[Click here](#) for the tutorial on YouTube.

#### 4. Textured High Bun with Bangs Pinned Back



For this sophisticated look, start with your natural curls or coils in a ponytail leaving out the front section. Then use a few bobby pins to pin down a few curls and the front section.

[Click here](#) for the tutorial on YouTube.

#### 5. Flat Twist Out



If you are not keen on individually twisting out your hair, you can still get a twist out with flat twists. In this particular video, she did not really cleanly part them as she intended to take out the hairstyle the next morning. If you make clean parts, you can pin up the style and wear it for a week or so.

[Click here](#) for the tutorial on YouTube.

## 6. The Afro



Trust me when I say there will come a day when you will remember with great fondness those halcyon days when you could wear an afro without serious consequences. Most women with long hair will avoid wearing an afro because the shrinkage and associated tangling can be detrimental to longer hair. However, when your hair is shorter, afros do not tend to tangle as much simply because there is less hair to deal with. Enjoy it while it lasts!

Also check out these tutorials:

**7. Stuffed Cinnabuns with Marley Hair** I am not a fan of added hair but I really liked this particular style because the emphasis was not on the extensions creating the style but rather just adding volume. It is a really neat trick to give some extra oomph when your hair is not yet quite long enough to do it on its own. [Click here](#) for the tutorial on YouTube.

**8. Twist Out** Twist outs are a standard thing for most naturals. It is not really that easy though to get a very defined twist out consistently. I think that this method and particularly her product layering is worth a look. It is all about trial and error! I would also say that if you are tired of seeing your forehead, the way this twist out was done, does create a sort of bang/fringe. [Click here](#) for the tutorial on YouTube.

**9. Fro-Hawk with Flat Twisted Sides** For this edgy look, the hair is flat twisted on the sides and twisted in the center. On the next day, the twists in the center are released to create this “fro” hawk. [Click here](#) for the tutorial on YouTube.

## 7 Protective Styles for Medium Length, Kinky Natural Hair

By Chinwe

### 1. Jumbo Twist Updo



Now this gorgeous style is one you can rock almost anywhere, be it a party, a date, the office, ... almost anywhere. Toyaboo starts on partially stretched natural hair, and within fifteen minutes, creates this masterpiece.

[Click here](#) for the tutorial on YouTube.

### 2. Two Cornrows Updo with a Side Part



Nyla is one my favorite YouTubers when it comes to styling her 4B/4C hair. In this video, she transforms a simple updo with two big cornrows into pure elegance.

[Click here](#) for the tutorial on YouTube.

### 3. Banana Clip Updo



Chrissy uses a banana clip to create this beautiful yet simple updo. Oh, the creativity!

[Click here](#) for the tutorial on YouTube.

### 4. Two Cornrows Updo with a Middle Part



In this tutorial, Koku demonstrates two cornrows with a middle part, which is a variation of the above side-part version. If you prefer a middle part, then you might want to check out this look.

[Click here](#) for the tutorial on YouTube.

## 5. Funky Three-Sided Puffs



Simplycre8eve is simply creative! Who would've ever thought to turn three puffs into a cute hairstyle? For this look, she starts out on blown-out hair.

[Click here](#) for the tutorial on YouTube.

## 6. Chunky Twists Updo



Starting on stretched hair, lydvina turns a combination of chunky twists and small twists into this gorgeous updo you see.

[Click here](#) for the tutorial on YouTube.

## 7. Textured Updo with a Scarf



VeePeeJay turns a chunky twist-out into a chic updo in this tutorial. I think it is a great style to fall back on if you're having a bad hair day or if you simply do not know what to do with your hair for the day.

[Click here](#) for the tutorial on YouTube.

## 3 Protective Styles for Maximum Length Retention of 4B/4C Hair

By Chinwe

If you have been natural for a while, you probably already know which protective styles work best for you. However, if you are new in your natural journey or been natural for some time but haven't found the protective style for you, check out the following recommendations:

### 1. Loose Twists – Easiest takedown



The benefits of this style – aside from length retention – are that it is fast to put in, easy to take down, and offers versatile styling. Loose twists are ideal for those who want the versatility and appearance of loose hair without actually wearing their hair loose. For more details on how to do and maintain loose twists, watch [this video](#) by MsTanish.

### 2. Box Braids – Longest lasting



When it comes to length retention of Type 4 hair, box braids are probably number one on the list – and also last the longest of these three. This protective style is super low maintenance and can be worn for a longer duration than twists. Additionally, because box braids do not expand as much as twists, you can wash your hair more frequently without worrying about unraveling and serious meshing. Box braids, especially miniature ones, do take time to put in but may be well worth it depending on your lifestyle. This protective style is ideal for those with fine strands since it hinders knots and tangles much more effectively than twists. For guidance on developing a box braid regimen, [watch Pookinapp's video on YouTube](#).

### 3. Small or Mini “Traditional” Twists – Easy to do well



Lastly, “traditional” twists – especially small or miniature ones – are a pretty popular and effective protective style for some Type 4 naturals. They are easy to do, low maintenance, and allow for versatile styling. However, they cannot be washed frequently (if at all) and also

get frizzy faster. But if you are not quite feeling the maintenance and/or style of loose twists AND you do not want to commit to putting in (and taking down) box braids, traditional twists – small or mini – may be the best option for you. For one example of a mini twist regimen, check out [KinkyKurlyQueen's \(pictured above\) video](#) on YouTube.

## How to Retain Length on 4B/4C Hair Without Protective Styling

Many 4B/4C naturals keep their hair in protective styles 90% of the time in order to retain length. It makes perfect sense. 4B/4C naturals, by definition, have strands that shrink up 75-85% (or more) into super tiny coils and kinks that go every which way. This “super shrinkage” can lead to knots and tangles, which can in turn lead to breakage and splits during the detangling process. Protective styling mitigates that issue by stretching and binding the hair down to the ends.

That being said, some of us do not like to wear protective styles day in and day out. Some us would love to wear our hair loose, out, and big for more than a couple of days. This desire raises the questions: *Can we retain length when not in a protective style?* It is possible if we are talking about just a few days, *but weeks or a month or more?* Many will tell you that it is difficult (including me), especially the longer and finer your hair. Nevertheless, difficult does not mean impossible. If you want to wear your hair out more while still retaining some length, here are some suggestions based on a few lessons learned and mini successes I have.

### **1. Choose a stretched style that is low maintenance**

This step *sounds* easier said than done, but stay with me. The key is to find a style that stretches your kinks/coils (to reduce tangling and thus breakage) while also requiring little re-touch (e.g., re-twisting, re-braiding, etc.). Here are few things I do to keep my loose styles low maintenance:

- I try to avoid twist-outs and instead turn to braid-outs. Twists do not stretch my hair as much as braids and, thus, the resulting set reverts faster. However, if I *really* want a twist-out, I will start from small twists (smaller twist-outs last longer) or I braid my twists for extra stretching.
- To maintain my braid-out for a week or two, I'll re-braid every 2 to 4 days depending on the humidity. The other portion of the time, I just sleep with my hair loose but shaped in a satin bonnet and fluff in the morning. Re-braiding nightly would just be too much manipulation for my hair. In a few cases, I will just re-braid the front to retouch my style.
- On wash days, I do the braid-outs on hair that is slightly stretched BUT still damp (e.g., via rollers that are worn for a couple of hours). I find that I get more of a stretched, smooth result this way.
- The back of my hair sometimes stays in braids and bunned, and thus stays protected. I do this because the back of my hair is finer and would also rub against my clothing if otherwise. I leave the rest of my hair out.
- I avoid separating my braid-outs at the ends, since those are likely to tangle. The most I'll do is separate or fluff the roots.
- Heat allows me to have my hair stretched for longer periods (up to 3 weeks), so sometimes that is an alternative. I will then do twist-outs or braid-outs on my heat-stretched hair.

Check out BGLH for articles on how to make stretched or straight styles last a while. Here are just a few:

[Ways to Make a Twist-out Last a Long Time](#)

[How to Maintain Roller Sets and Twist-outs During a Humid Summer](#)

[Ways to Make Straightened Hair Last Longer](#)

## **2. Decelerate “super shrinkage” with a good anti-humidity product or gel**

For those humid days, a good anti-humidity product or gel makes the difference between a style that lasts a few hours and one that lasts a couple days. I have tried many anti-humidity products, and have come to the conclusion that my hair will shrink regardless but it will shrink *much* less and slower with the product. Gel is not immensely better, but it will just give me a bit more hold.

Whatever type of product you choose, understand this: The idea is not to maintain a perfectly defined or stretched style day by day. Instead, we seek to slow down that “super shrinkage” as long as possible. No amount of anti-humidity product and gel will help me maintain a perfectly defined twist-out or braid-out in 90% or more humidity ... but it will help to maintain some of my stretch.

## **3. Keep your hair in a “detangled” state**

Knots and tangles will more than likely occur, but you can keep it at a minimum. Here are a few ways to do that:

- Over-separating your twist-out or braid-out may accelerate shrinkage, which translates to tangles and knot formation.
- Styling on tangled hair can spell disaster, so I attempt to avoid that. It would just create more tangles and knots.
- Bind the style at night via a [satin bonnet](#) or loose bun(s)/puff(s) and a [satin pillowcase](#). If you toss and turn at night, this will help to reduce tangles and knots.
- Try not to play in your hair too much. I have a habit of doing this, so when I’m in the house by myself, I slap on a satin bonnet as a deterrent.

## **4. Using heat is an option, but use it sparingly and WISELY**

Like I mentioned in tip #1, heat helps me to have a low-maintenance stretched style for up to 3 weeks, depending on the humidity. This is because my hair takes longer to revert with heat usage than without it, as is the case with most naturals. Across the web, you will find other naturals who also benefit from heat, especially via blow drying, prior to doing a braid-out or twist-out.

So, heat is an option – as long as you don't overdo it and abuse it. Also, consider this: If you are a 4C natural with fine strands, you may have to use less heat (frequency and temperature) than a 4C natural with thick strands. Check out the earlier section on how to minimize damage when using heat.

## **5. Moisturize on the “refresh” nights**

Because your hair is out and free rather than in a protective style, you will need to moisturize more frequently. I know that for me, the duration that I can go without re-moisturizing goes from one week when my hair is in a protective style down to a few days when it's in a loose style. If that is the case with you, it helps to re-moisturize – and to do it WELL – on the night that you are refreshing your stretched style, i.e. re-twisting or re-braiding. This method will help you to avoid the inevitable shrinkage and tangles that will come if you moisturize and leave your hair loose.

## **6. Keep your ends oiled**

This helps to reduce the formation of splits and breakage as well as tangles and knots. On “refresh” nights, soak your ends with oil. This decreases split, crunchy and dry ends on loose hair.

## **7. Amp up the protein deep conditioning**

4B/4C hair needs all the strength and elasticity it can get when not in protective styles, and protein conditioners can temporarily provide both, especially to your ends. These types of conditioners help natural hair to be better prepared for styling manipulation and consequently avoid breakage. If you are protein sensitive, check out this post on [“5 Conditioners for Protein-Sensitive Hair”](#).

# SPEED REGIMENS

## What To Do If You Want Longer Hair in 1 Year

By JC of [The Natural Haven Bloom](#)

If your hair is not gaining length or if you have had less than stellar results this year, this article is for you. These are 5 simple steps to reverse stagnant hair into long thriving hair

### **1. Accept that what you are doing does not work**

You are doing it all, protective styling, moisturizing and deep conditioning but still haven't managed to move your hair an inch. It is time to face the facts – your current routine, despite having all the good stuff, really does not work.

It is time for a critical assessment. Do you keep a protective style in long enough to actually gain length? Do you moisturize at the critical points when moisture is needed (*when taking down a style and handling loose hair*) and do you avoid handling your hair at its weakest state (*soaking wet*)? Could you be doing too much to your hair thereby causing unnecessary wear.

### **2. Know when your hair breaks**

The reason for hair staying at a stagnant length is because it is breaking just as fast as it is growing. It is really important to know when your hair is most vulnerable to breakage and this varies from person to person depending on your individual strand thickness and choice of styling. The most common breakage points are:

- During takedown of a protective style (especially at the ends)
- During detangling (both conditioner combing and dry detangling)
- While wearing hair free (due to tangling, shrinkage, knots and regular handling)

Once you identify why and when your hair is most vulnerable to breakage, you will be able to know exactly when you must protect your hair from damage.

### **3. Try something new**

Having accepted that what you are doing does not work, it is time to try something new. If you have been conditioner combing, try dry or damp detangling for a while and see how it works for you. Compare your results after 2 to 3 months and decide which one really works best for you. If you have never deep conditioned your hair, try doing it for 2 to 3 months and see if your hair improves. If you only use heavy oils or butters on your hair, try light oils and see if your hair would equally be happy with those. Do not write things off before you actually try them.

### **4. Know when to stop**

I am really all for trying something new but equally you should know when to stop. If a technique causes immediate breakage, stop doing it. Do not think perhaps your hair is shedding more than usual, assume that the technique is not working for your hair and must be adjusted to suit your curls and kinks or not used at all. If you are deep conditioning 2 to 3

times a week and your hair is not moisturized, stop and reassess how you are conditioning (*is your conditioner working, do you need to warm it up first, could you do with some protein, do you use a leave in/moisturizer/oil after washing*).

#### **5. Have realistic expectations**

Finally hair takes a long time to grow. Many naturals cannot retain 100% of their growth. There is a small portion of women who can keep all their growth but I feel that it is more reasonable to expect between 3-5 inches per year with a regular trimming or dusting routine.

## What To Do If You Want Longer Hair in 3 Months

Is your hair longer now than it was 3 months ago? If your answer is yes, well done! If your answer is no, then this article is for you. If your desire is to finally see your hair gain length, then here are 5 steps that you can take to achieve that goal:

### **1. Give it time – 2 to 3 months**

It is difficult to see hair growth on a week-to-week basis. Sometimes it is also difficult to see on a monthly basis as not all parts of the head have hair growing at the same time. However after 2 to 3 months, hair length gains are generally un-missable. You need to measure your current length and that is it, no more measuring until your 2 or 3 month period is over.

### **2. Stop trimming. Opt for search and destroy**

If you are scissor happy and addicted to fresh ends with hair that curls perfectly, this could be a big reason why you are not seeing length gains. Sometimes, none of that hair that you are cutting is damaged; it's just older and needs a little extra conditioning, moisturizing or just to be tucked in. If you are not seeing hair length gains, opt for a search and destroy method for the next 3 months. Only hair with a visible split should be cut off. No splits, no cuts.

### **3. Low maintenance AND no manipulation**

For the next 2 to 3 months choose a hairstyle/s that you would consider low maintenance and either low or no manipulation. Low maintenance means that it requires no more than 5 minutes to style and look presentable.

A low manipulation style is one that requires a small amount of detangling, for example a wash and go on hair that does not tangle easily. A no-manipulation style is one that requires NO handling of individual strands on a daily basis. Examples include twists/braids, braids or twists with hair extensions, wigs and weaves. If you can keep a no manipulation style for 2 months without taking it out (except around the perimeter which often needs redoing every 1 to 2 weeks), you are well on your way to longer hair.

### **4. Find a washing routine, stick with it**

If you are going to keep a no-manipulation style, never neglect your hair. You should continue to wash and condition it as you normally would, whether this is weekly, fortnightly or monthly. You should not increase or decrease your frequency as even hair washing counts as manipulation.

### **5. Keep your loose hair stretched**

If you want a break from a no-manipulation style then make sure that you always choose a stretched style to showcase your loose hair. Stretching your hair minimizes tangles that

cause breakage and damage. No-heat stretching with banding, twists outs/knot outs/braid outs, [Curlformers](#) or African threading will generally yield the least damage to your hair.

# PROGRESS!

## Signs You're On Your Way to Long Hair

By JC of [The Natural Haven Bloom](#)

Long natural hair is not something that happens quickly, it will take between 3 to 5 years to have that much desired hair down your back. If you are just starting your journey or if you have made some mistakes and wish to redirect your energy into results, here are some of the small but highly significant steps that will mark that you are on the right path.

### **1. No pain when handling your hair**

As a child I learned to grit my teeth and bear the pain as my hair was combed with a [fine-toothed comb](#). My hair also did not gain length and it was easy to see why – huge hair balls after each combing session. It's common to hear stylists refer to clients as tender-headed when in truth hair is being ripped out, hence the pain. You are making significant progress when you no longer associate pain with the detangling/combing/styling process.

### **2. No hair on the floor**

The less the hair you see on the floor or on your clothes when combing, the better. Ideally you should only see hair in the tool that you use to detangle (so if you are finger combing, shed hair will be unraveled with your fingers or if you are combing with a brush/comb then the shed hair should be trapped with the comb). If you have a good method of combing that suits your hair texture then you will greatly minimize breakage.

### **3. You are patient**

Patience is a big part of handling natural hair. It is required in every aspect from the shorter periods of detangling and styling to the long-term period of growth and retention where you have to give your hair enough time in appropriate styles to gain length. The moment when you realize that your hair cannot be hurried, the easier you will find it to handle. For example, you can easily style your hair in 5-10 minutes but patience dictates that you must select what works best for your hair. It is easy enough to make a quick bun on dry hair but this will not work for wet (and high shrinkage) 4B/4C hair. In that case, it may be easier to place 5-6 twists on wet hair and pin them up into a style. Later when your hair is dry, you can style as you please.

### **4. You accept that your hair cannot do everything**

Natural hair is versatile and in general can be styled in almost any way. However, not all hair can do everything well. Some people can wash their hair every day and it will look perfect. Other people simply cannot do the same as their scalp may become progressively drier or, if their hair is longer, the washing may increase tangling. Some people can safely heat style

their hair but others cannot. If your hair feels brittle or breaks after even a low heat blow dry, you may have to accept heat is not for you. Some people can sit in protective styles for months while others would develop serious matting. You have to do what works for you.

## **5. Your product hunt is over**

You need to experiment with products to find which ones best suit your hair. There does come a point though when you eventually find your favorites. You can purchase other products because you want to try them out but that should be out of curiosity and not out of necessity. You should know what works for you and for what reason. For example if your hair feels particularly dry, you should know which conditioner to pick out of your arsenal and how long to leave it on your hair for best results. If you need to add oil to your hair, you should know which one or which combination to use and how often. You know that products will not grow your hair but rather help it to stay in good condition (i.e take care of the cuticle and maintain moisture).

## Real Life Success Story: How Geniece Went from Shoulder to Waist Length

By Geniece Crawford of [Sunshower143](#)



*On the left: Twist Out Winter 2007; On the right: Current Length*

In 2009 when I had my hair care “aha!” moment I couldn’t wait to share the news with others. After months of researching natural hair care on Youtube, hair websites and experimenting with my hair I realized that things had finally taken a turn for the better. I started a [vlog](#) and began documenting my journey through pictures. When I realized by the middle of 2010 that I would likely reach my first goal of armpit length by the end of the year I set another hair goal of bra strap length for the following year. One thing I did not expect in 2009 was that I would change how I cared for my hair as my lengths goals changed.

Growing out short hair to medium length was more challenging than growing out medium length hair to long. Moreover, once your hair is already long, say bra strap length, setting a goal of mid back length is less daunting. In 2009 my hair was shoulder length but layered such that some hair fell a little past ear length, while the hair closest to my nape reached my shoulder. Initially, I focused on growing out my layers and getting my hair to reach a few inches past shoulder length within 7 months. This involved weekly deep conditioning and 24/7 protective styling. I had been pretty rough with my hair during the previous years with daily combing and brushing, so keeping it pinned up in low maintenance style wasn’t a sacrifice, but a relief. When I blow dried my hair in May 2010 I was stunned to see after only 7 months of proper hair care that my fro started to hang (as opposed to stick straight up) due to the weight of additional length. In the years that followed, I adjusted my regimen to reflect more ambitious hair length goals.



*Mini Twists Summer 2010, Arm pit Length Stretched*

That first year I set a goal of retaining 6 inches so that with trims I'd end the year with 4-5 healthy inches of hair. The following year I had a similar goal. My ultimate goal was waist length so when I set a goal to grow my hair from bra strap length to mid back length I knew that was a mere 3 inches. I was fine giving myself an entire year to reach that goal and therefore skipped some of the steps in my regimen. The reasons I was able to abbreviate my regimen are two fold. First, keep in mind that as your hair grows the time it takes to do certain tasks increases significantly. In 2009 I could detangle and wash my hair in the shower in about 30 minutes. Now, the application of my pre-poo and detangling takes a little over 1 hour and then I have to wash my hair, which takes an additional 30 minutes. Second, I begin my hair journey with hair that had been roughed up by my lack understanding. I needed to make up for poor practices by babying my hair. My hair was much healthier two years later because it had not been subject to weekly blow out sessions or a lack of proper moisture. I could therefore deep condition less without damaging my hair.



*Blow out, Spring 2011, Bra Strap Length Stretched*

By 2012 I no longer cared to retain 6 inches of hair each year and was therefore more comfortable not deep conditioning every week even if it meant I would need to trim more frequently. My hair wasn't super long but it had reached the length that I set as a goal back in 2009. As of the writing of this post my hair has recently been blow dried and is about 2 inches longer than it was December, meaning I've retained all four months of growth.



*Current Length of My Hair, Waist Length Stretched*

The take away advice I want to leave you with is this: If you currently have ear length hair and ultimately want to reach mid back length or waist length don't believe that you are glued to your current regimen. If you implement excellent hair care and are able to hit a new milestone each year, you will eventually find that there are some steps that you can skip without ruining

your hair journey. Sure, you may not get every single ½ inch possible but you will be able to know how to maintain your hair length or shoot for 2 to 3 inches a year when you reach the point when you actually don't want to grow your hair much longer. That point may seem a long way off right now, but with proper hair care trust me, it will come sooner than you realize.

## Real Life Success Story: How Chinwe Went from Neck to Waist Length in 5 Years



Neck length hair is about 4-5 inches stretched for some naturals. If you can retain at least a little over 3 inches a year, then you're on track to reach waist length in almost five years. This sounds easy, right? Well, not quite. The hard part for many of us is actually retaining that length over time, especially if one doesn't exactly average 6 inches of growth per year. However, that obstacle can be overcome if you quickly learn your hair at every stage of your growth. Well, here are some tips that helped me – as well as lessons learned from setbacks – to get from neck length to waist length (2008-2013). Hopefully they can help you as well.

### **1. Find a hair “sibling” with waist length hair (i.e., a natural who has at least 3 of the following: similar hair texture, density, porosity, or type)**

This was a big one for me. Without finding a “hair sibling”, I wouldn't have reached my goal in that time frame, if at all. After big chopping, I remember replicating the hair care regimens of waist length naturals (from the beginning of their journeys onwards) with hair very similar to mine. [Sera252](#) and [Kemi21/Aijo](#) were my main “hair siblings” because they are both predominantly 4B/4C, medium-to-high density, and low-to-medium porosity naturals. Additionally, Sera252's texture is a mix of fine/medium like mine. I also looked to [Mwedzi's](#)

regimen because of similar characteristics, especially her seemingly identical high shrinkage rate.

“Hair cousins” (naturals who share one or two of your hair’s characteristics) are also useful. For instance, I looked to [Naptural85](#) (for her “keep it simple” methods on her high shrinkage hair) though her hair type is different from mine. So, finding “hair siblings” – and a few “hair cousins” – who have reached waist length can certainly be useful in your growth journey. Don’t just go by hair type alone but texture, density, and porosity.

## **2. Pay close attention to your hair and how it responds to certain practices**

As your hair grows longer, your regimen will more than likely need regular adjustments. You’ll need to pay close attention to your hair and how it behaves with certain practices, methods, etc. Does your hair respond better or worse when you use your fingers to detangle instead of a comb? Does it respond better or worse with long-term protective styling versus other low manipulation options? What about detangling on dry hair versus damp or wet hair? If you figure out these things sooner than later, it will save you from major setbacks along the way.

My rule of thumb: If I see several little c’s or o’s (broken 4C hairs) on the floor or in the sink, I decide that method is not for me. Noticeable breakage is usually a good indicator, so get in the habit of looking out for that (and split ends) regularly.

## **3. Save severe experimentation (e.g., color, press) for later in your journey**

The very core of experimentation involves not knowing what your outcome will be and when it comes to hair care, this can be detrimental for those on a serious growth journey. Now, this tip is not necessarily in reference to trying out a new product but to big commitments such as coloring or pressing your natural hair. When taking on such projects, you must be willing to deal with possible breakage or setbacks. If you’re not, then why bother?

## **4. Finally, incorporate the hair care “standards” – low manipulation, moisture, and deep conditioning**

Of course, this post would not be complete without mentioning some hair care “standard” practices, such as low manipulation styling/routine, regular moisture and regular deep conditioning. I have yet to hear about a natural who has reached long lengths without doing all three.

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