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The One Swap That Leaves Hair Softer, Shinier, and Deeply Nourished

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The Best Hair Balms ELLE Editors Love Courtesy of Cécred; Sisley Paris

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The hair world is teeming with new—or newly discovered—products designed to make styling, length retention, and maintenance a breeze...to the point where it can get confusing. Scroll on the internet, and you'll be even more confused: Are we supposed to be using hair serums over oils? Can these hair growth supplements truly deliver results? What exactly is a hair balm?

Like a lip balm, hair balm offers similar benefits—sort of. “A hair balm is a moisturizing styling product with a light to medium hold that hydrates, adds shine, and helps to reduce frizz. It is best to start with a small, dime-sized amount and rub the balm between the palms to warm it up. It can be used on damp or dry hair,” explains Dr. Debbie Palmer, an author, board-certified dermatologist, and co-founder of Dermatology Associates of New York. Hair balms are typically thicker in texture than creams or lotions, so it’s important to emulsify the product in your hands first. Dr. Ryan B. Turner—a fellow New York-based board-certified dermatologist who specializes in cosmetic dermatology, general dermatology, surgical dermatology, and laser surgery—suggests using it “sparingly on dry hair to control frizz or define ends” and to “focus on the mid-length of the hair and ends to avoid weighing down roots.”

ELLE Editors’ Favorite Hair Balms of 2026

- **The ELLE Editor Favorite:** [Cécred Hair & Scalp Balm](#), \$36
- **The Damage Savior:** [Redken Acidic Bonding Concentrate Hair Bandage Balm](#), \$46
- **The Curly-Hair Smoother:** [Camille Rose Pure Batana Oil Honduran Miracle Balm](#), \$16

Added benefits include nourishing ingredients such as olive oil, jojoba oil, and coconut oil, which Dr. Palmer says to look for when shopping for a hair balm. Dr. Turner agrees, adding that humectants like glycerin or emollients like mango butter help condition dry hair. However, it’s wise to “avoid overly heavy waxes if hair is fine or prone to scalp buildup,” Turner says.

If your hair feels or looks particularly dry between styles, or simply needs some extra, non-stiff smoothing, try incorporating a hair balm into your routine. This new shift doesn’t have to scare you—especially when we’ve compiled a list of the seven best hair balms experts and customers constantly rave about. Shop our editor-approved picks below.

1) Cécred Hair & Scalp Balm

2) Redken Acidic Bonding Concentrate Hair Bandage Balm

3) Camille Rose Pure Batana Oil Honduran Miracle Balm

4) The Doux Curl Defining Cream & Pomade

5) Act + Acre Styling Paste

6) Charlotte Mensah Manketti Oil Pomade

7) Sisley-Paris Hair Rituel Restructuring Nourishing Balm

Meet the experts

- [Dr. Debbie Palmer](#) is an author, board-certified dermatologist, and co-founder of Dermatology Associates of New York.
- [Dr. Ryan Turner](#) is a New York-based board-certified dermatologist who specializes in cosmetic dermatology, general dermatology, surgical dermatology, and laser surgery.

When it comes to oils, serums, and balms, what are the differences beyond texture? Is one better than the other?

Think of the order in terms of weight—lighter first, heavier to follow. “Hair serum is a targeted hair treatment that addresses a specific hair concern. They tend to be concentrated and have a thin and slippery feel,” Dr. Palmer explains. A hair serum would typically be your first go-to post-wash, whether on your scalp or hair ends. “Serums are typically silicone-based and designed for smoothing, heat protection, and humidity resistance,” Dr. Turner shares.

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Most commonly used, a hair oil “is an oil-based hair treatment to moisturize and smooth the hair. They tend to have an oilier texture and can be used on wet or dry hair,” she adds. Dr. Turner explains that oils are heavier “occlusives and emollients, helping to seal the cuticle and enhance shine.” Balms, on the other hand, typically start off solid and then melt into an oil. “Balms are hybrid formulations—usually combining oils, butters, waxes, and other structuring agents—designed for both nourishment and light hold, making them more versatile for styling while offering hair repair,” Dr. Turner says.

What ingredients should you look for?

Learning the different forms of conditioning products will help streamline your shopping experience, especially when treating dryness or damage. According to Dr. Turner, look for “emollients: shea butter, mango butter [that offer] deep moisture; lightweight oils like argan, jojoba that boost shine without being too heavy; humectants, such as glycerin for hydration; and strengtheners like hydrolyzed proteins or ceramides.”

Why Trust ELLE Beauty?

As a leading publisher of fashion, lifestyle, and beauty content, ELLE.com is committed to highlighting the best products in various categories by personally testing the latest and most innovative products, interviewing countless experts, and vetting customer-loved items. For this piece, beauty editor Nerisha Penrose consulted dermatologists

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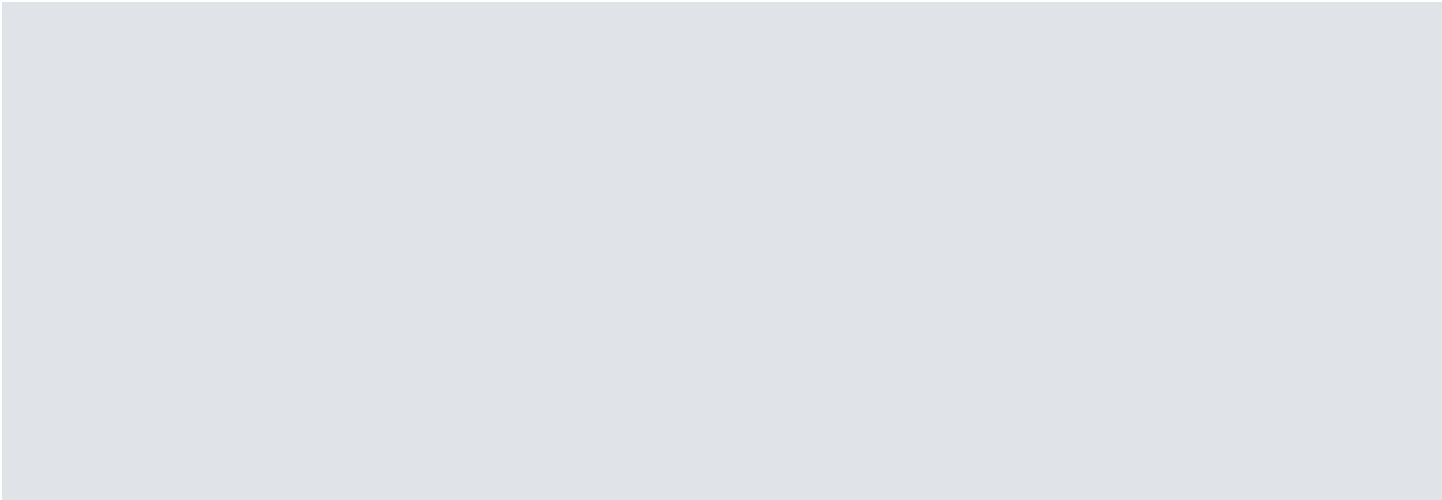
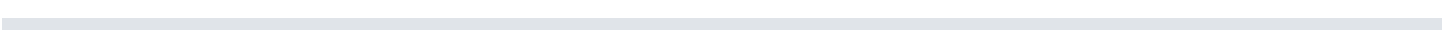
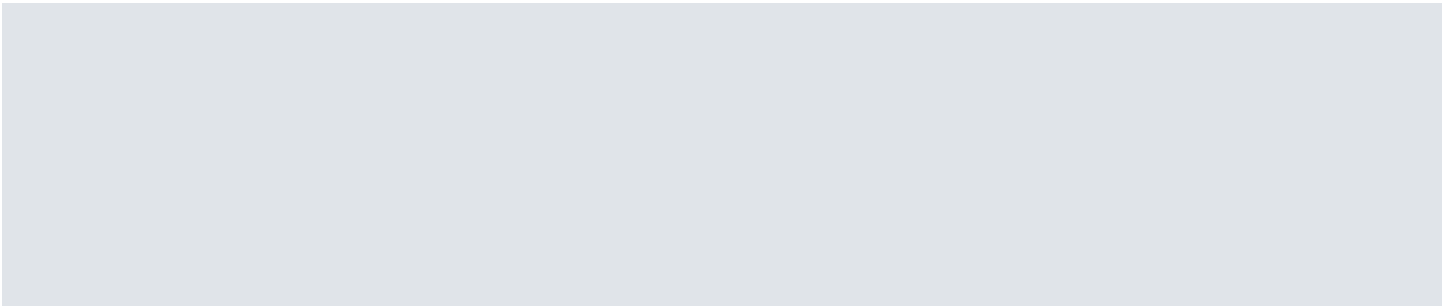
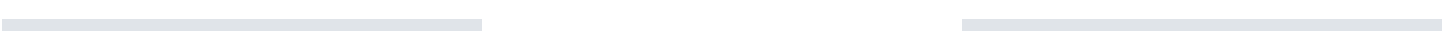
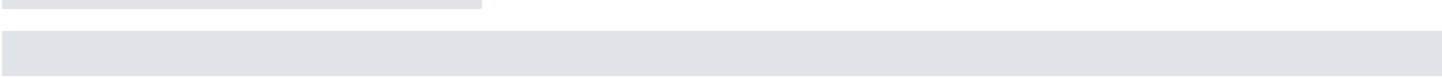
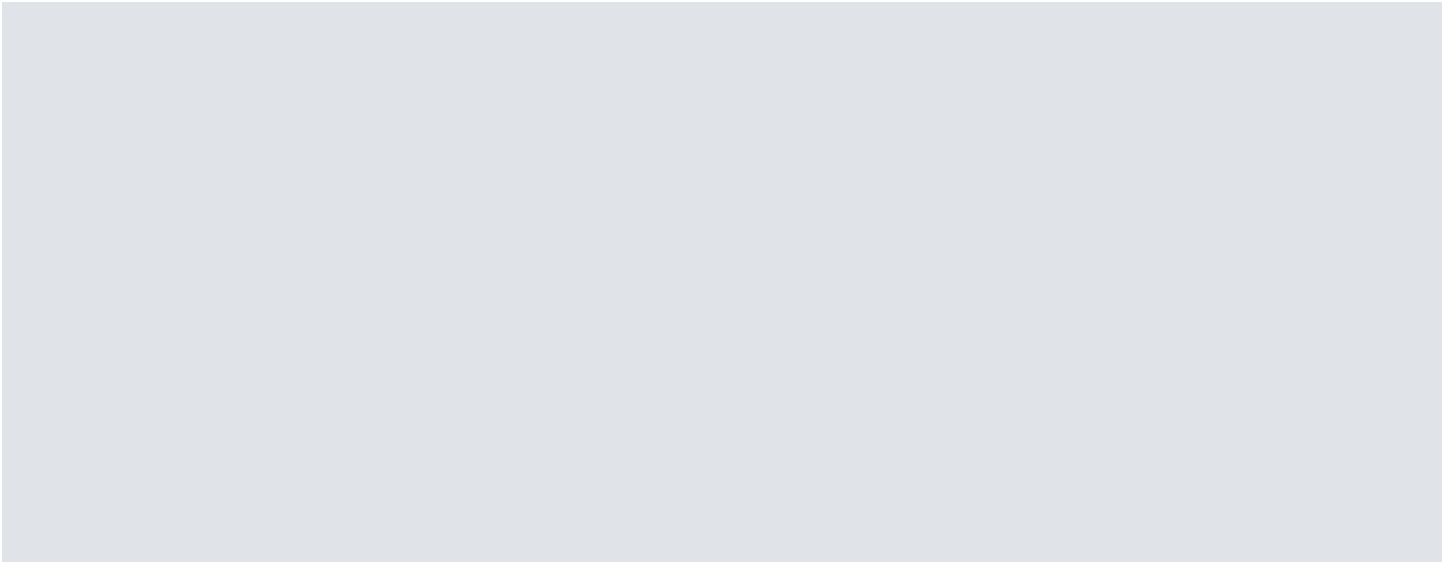
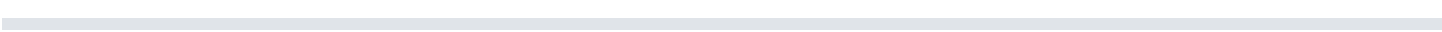
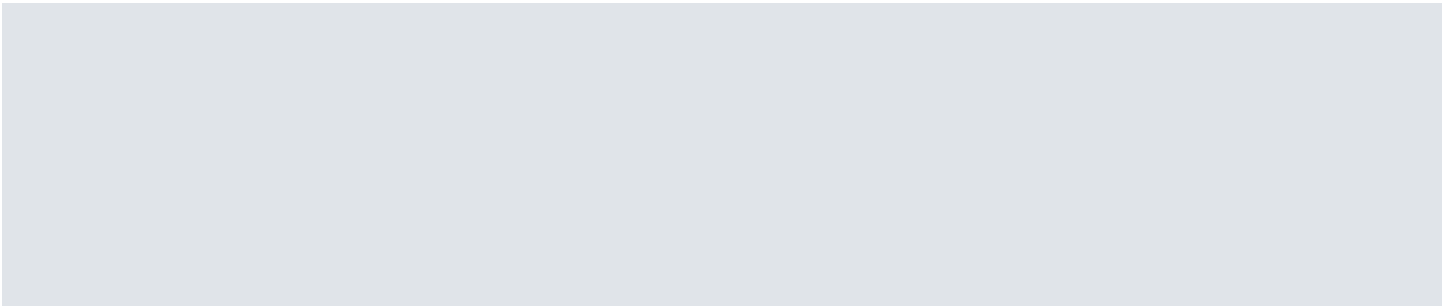
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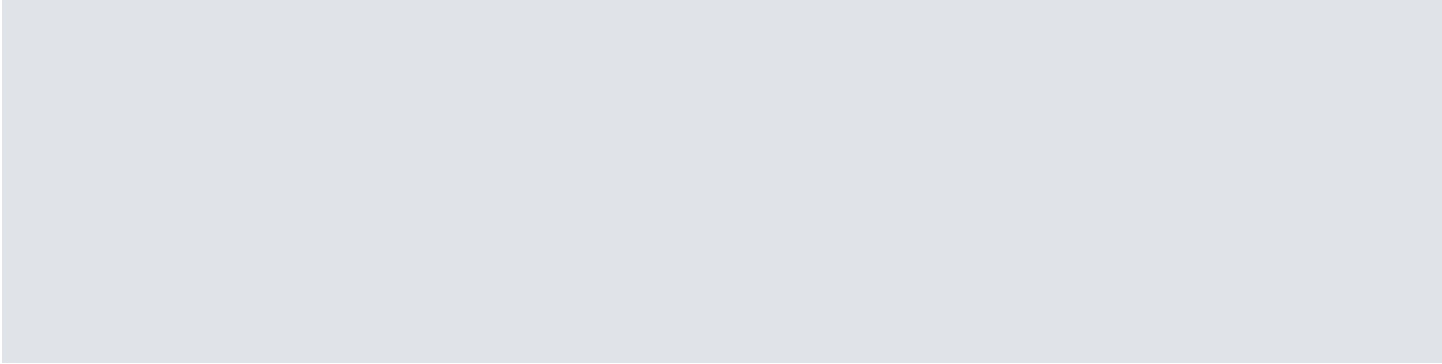
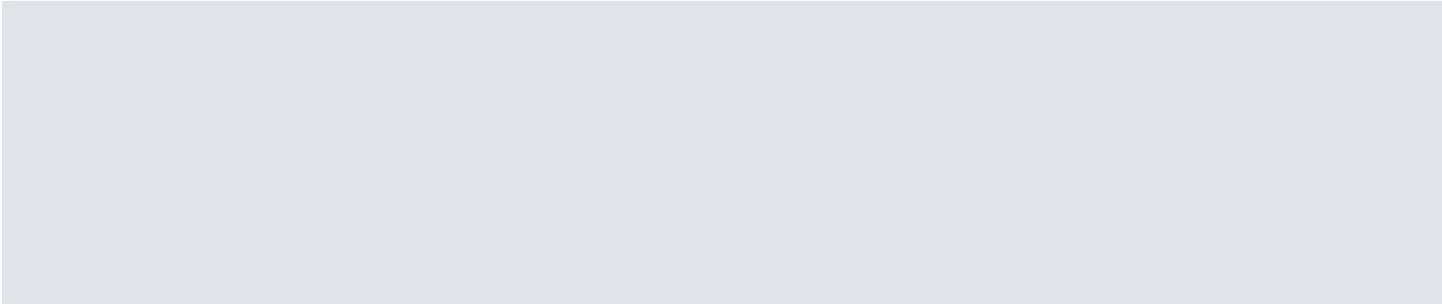
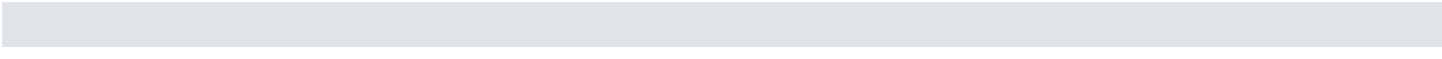
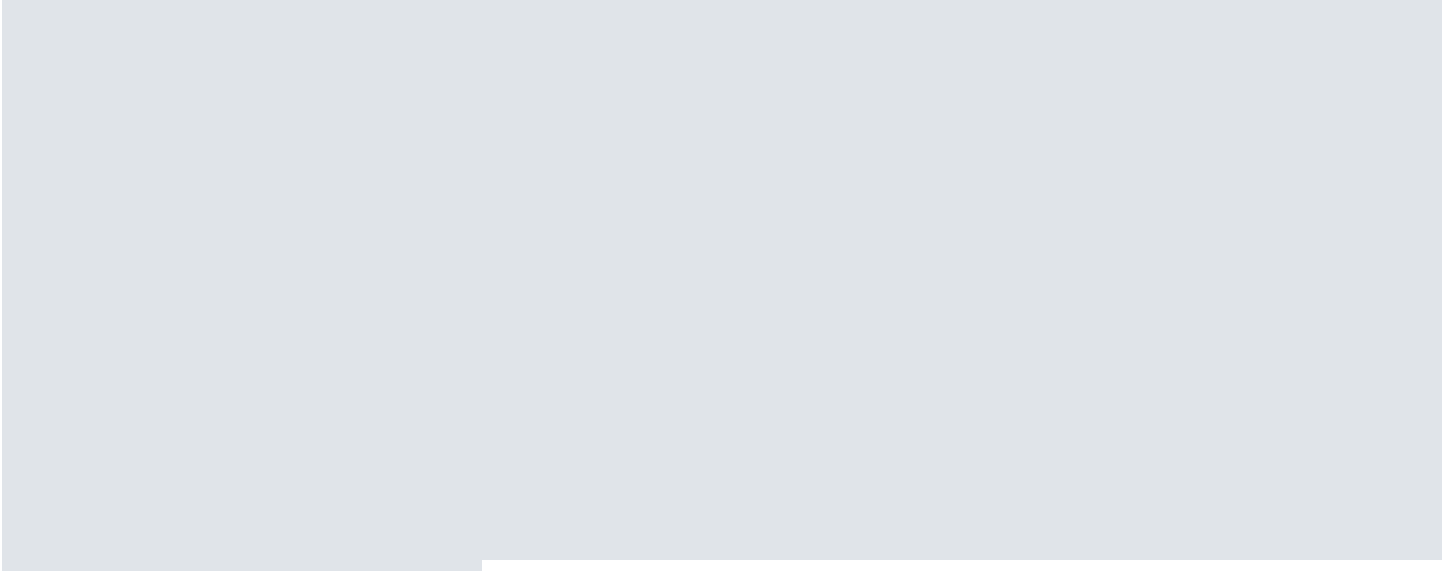
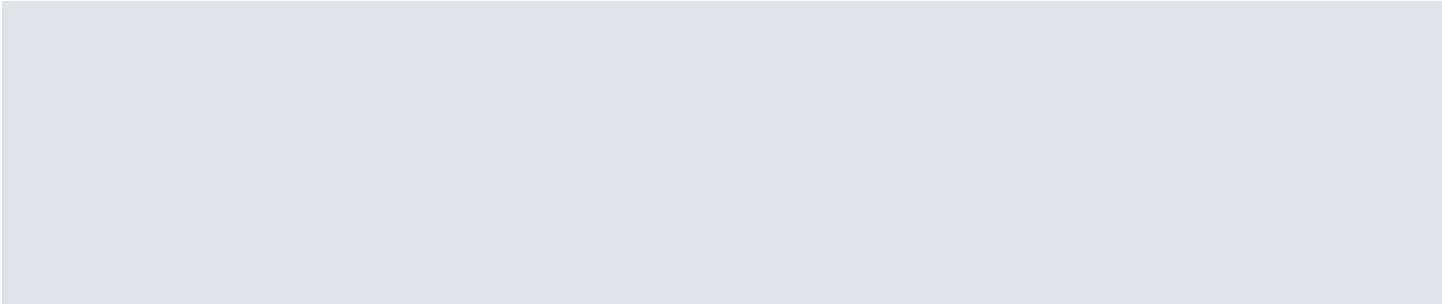
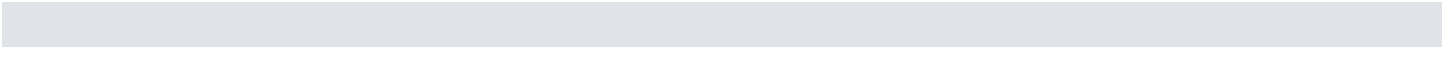
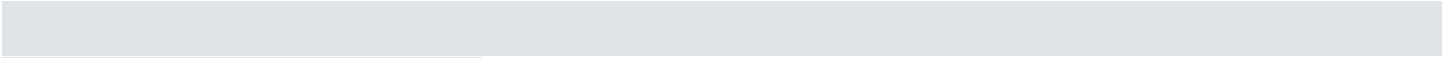
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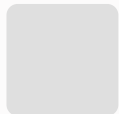
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