

mousse

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Mousse

A foam styling product applied to damp hair before drying. Mousse is the format that solves a specific distribution problem: **it delivers a small amount of polymer evenly across a large amount of hair**, which is exactly what volume and curl definition require and exactly what a gel or a cream does badly.

Why the foam

Whipping a liquid into foam with a propellant multiplies its apparent volume many times. A walnut-sized handful of mousse contains only a fraction of a gram of polymer — but that fraction can be spread through a whole head of hair without weighing anything down, because most of what your hands are holding is gas.

Class	Doing what	Names
Film former	The hold	PVP, VP/VA copolymer, polyquaternium-11, acrylates copolymer
Propellant	Makes the foam	Isobutane, propane, butane
Surfactant	Stabilises the foam	Cocamidopropyl betaine, oleth-20
Conditioning	Slip, static control	Polyquaternium-10, panthenol, silicones

Water	The bulk	Aqua
Preservative	Essential	Phenoxyethanol, sodium benzoate

What it is genuinely good at

- **Root volume.** Applied at the roots of damp hair and dried with the head upside down or with a round brush, mousse produces lift that no other format matches — the polymer holds hair away from the scalp as it dries.
- **Curl definition on fine and wavy hair.** Heavier gels and creams flatten a fine wave; mousse defines it without weight.
- **Even distribution on long hair**, where a cream applied in handfuls is always patchy.
- **A base layer** under other products.

Its weakness is the reverse of its strength: on **coarse, coily or very dry hair** the polymer load per gram is too low to do much, and a [Curl Cream](#) or gel is the better tool.

Using it

- **Shake the can hard**, every time. An unshaken mousse dispenses propellant and watery liquid.
- **Damp hair, not wet.** Wring or towel-blot first.
- **A golf-ball to an orange-sized amount**, depending on hair length — much more than people expect, because most of it is air.
- **Scrunch or rake through, then dry.** Air-drying gives softer results; a diffuser gives more volume.
- **Do not touch while drying.** Handling a setting polymer film is what creates frizz.
- **Scrunch out the crunch** once fully dry — breaking the cast leaves the shape without the stiffness.

Where it sits in the rules

Cosmetic in the US — FDA primary category **(06) hair preparations (non-coloring)**. No monograph applies.

The aerosol rules do apply. **Chlorofluorocarbon propellants are prohibited** in cosmetics — one of the eleven entries FDA specifically restricts — and **vinyl chloride and zirconium-containing complexes are prohibited in aerosols**, two more. The **21 CFR 740.11 warning statement** for self-pressurised containers is required: do not puncture or incinerate, do not store above 120 °F, keep away from children, with flammability wording where a flammable propellant is used.

Non-aerosol pump-foam mousses exist and avoid the pressure vessel entirely, at the cost of a coarser foam.

Shelf life

Two years or more. The can is sealed, the contents are preserved, and nothing returns to the reservoir — one of the more robust formats in the bathroom.

The failure modes are mechanical: a **blocked nozzle**, or a can that has lost pressure and dispenses liquid. A mousse that comes out watery and collapses immediately has lost its propellant and is finished. As with

any aerosol, do not store it hot, puncture it or incinerate it.

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- Regulatory statements here follow the FDA and EU sources listed on [Cosmetics](#), read 16 August 2026.