

pomade

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Pomade

A greasy or waxy styling product for slicking, shaping and shine. Pomade is the oldest men's styling product in continuous use — the name comes from *pomme*, because early versions were scented with apple — and the modern market divides sharply into two chemistries that behave completely differently.

Oil-based versus water-based

	Oil-based	Water-based
Base	Petrolatum, mineral oil, beeswax, lanolin	Water, glycerin, film-forming polymers
Shine	High and lasting	Varies; often high but drier
Hold	Pliable all day, never sets	Sets firm as water evaporates
Restyles	Yes, repeatedly, with hands	No — restyling breaks the film
Washes out	With difficulty — needs a degreasing shampoo, sometimes several washes	Easily, with water
Tradition	The classic pompadour product	The modern default

The washing-out problem is the whole practical difference. Petrolatum-based pomade resists water almost completely. Removing it takes an anionic [Clarifying Shampoo](#), sometimes preceded by working an oil or a conditioner through dry hair to emulsify it. People who use heavy oil-based pomade and wash with a gentle shampoo end up with progressive build-up on the hair and scalp.

Pomade acne, and other consequences

Occlusive product on and around the hairline has a documented consequence: **pomade acne** — closed comedones and papules along the forehead and temples, caused by follicular occlusion. It is a recognised clinical entity and it resolves when the product stops reaching the skin.

The related problems: **folliculitis** on an occluded scalp, and **seborrhoeic dermatitis flares**, because *Malassezia* thrives on trapped lipid.

The mitigations are simple. Apply from **mid-length to ends, keeping the product off the scalp and the hairline**; wash the hairline properly; and if the forehead is breaking out along the top edge, switch to a water-based product before blaming diet.

Choosing and using

- **Warm it between the palms** until it turns glossy and thin. Applying cold pomade straight from the tin puts a lump in one place.
- **Dry or towel-dried hair**, depending on the product — water-based pomades usually distribute better on damp hair.
- **Start with less than a fingernail's worth.** Pomade is the most over-applied product on the men's shelf.
- **Back to front**, then shape.
- **A pre-styling blow-dry does most of the work.** Pomade holds a shape the dryer created; it cannot create one on its own.

Where it sits in the rules

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

Petrolatum and mineral oil are permitted and well-tolerated in both jurisdictions; the EU restricts **untreated and mildly treated mineral oils** under Annex II as carcinogens, and refined cosmetic grades are not those. **Lanolin** is worth flagging as a common contact allergen in traditional formulas.

Water-based pomades are leave-on products, so in the EU **methylisothiazolinone is prohibited** in them and preservatives come from the **Annex V closed positive list**.

Shelf life

Oil-based: two to three years. Anhydrous, largely saturated, and effectively self-preserving — these are among the most stable products in the catalogue, limited only by rancidity in any unsaturated oils.

Water-based: 12–18 months after opening, with the usual tub-and-fingers caveat.

Heat destroys the texture of a wax-based tin: melted and re-set pomade turns grainy as the waxes recrystallise, which is cosmetic rather than unsafe.

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