

Gelling 101

WHAT YOU'LL NEED (covers 1 head + touch ups):

- hair brush
- hair elastics, large for ponytail and small for braids
- open bobby pins
- hairnet (unless swimmer will be wearing a bun cover)
- round plastic or pyrex container with lid (not square – gel gets stuck in the corners)
- 12 packets of **Knox** gelatin (do not use bulk brand gel, it dissolves too quickly in the pool!)
- plastic spoon
- paint brush (1-1.5 inches), basting brush, hair colour application brush, or tooth brush
- slow cooker or kettle
- water

HAIR PREPARATION:

An important part of a successful gel job is the preparation of the swimmer's hair before the gel is applied. Ensure the hair is slightly damp, pull it into a very smooth tight ponytail. The bottom of the ponytail elastic should be approximately in line with the top of the ears. Then divide the ponytail into 2-4 braids depending on the thickness of the hair. Wrap the braids into a bun and pin snugly using open hairpins; cover the bun with a hairnet (hairnet is not necessary if swimmer is wearing a buncover!)

GEL PREPARATION:

Slow Cooker Method (gel will be much smoother but must be prepared in advance):

Empty 12 packets of Knox gelatin into slow cooker and then add 1 cup lukewarm tap water; stir SLOWLY and very gently. Stirring slowly is key to avoiding unwanted bubbles and foam from developing during the mixing process). The mixture will be thick, clumpy and white.

Turn on crockpot, cover and leave for 1-2 hours, until melted and clear.

Either use immediately (keep slow cooker on warm setting, leave in slow cooker and reheat later in the day when needed, or refrigerate for use on a later day and re-melt in slow cooker when ready to use. Plan for 1-2 hours for gel to melt from solid state.

Kettle Method (gel in a hurry!):

Boil water. Empty 4 packets of Knox gelatin into a container. Add 1/3 cup boiling water – water must be at boiling temperature so ensure the kettle is recently boiled. Stir slowly and gently to dissolve the gel. When gel is dissolved and mixture is mostly clear, scoop any bubbles off of top and any undissolved clumps of gel into a garbage can. You can also remove bubbles and clumps by passing the gel through a mesh strainer.

If gel is particularly clumpy you can try microwaving it for 15-20 seconds to melt it more – make sure to watch it and stop it if it starts to boil! You may want to let the gel cool slightly after this so as not to burn your swimmer's head.

Apply gel to swimmer's head, wash out container with hot water, and make another batch of gel for the next coat! It is very important that hardening gel from the previous coat is removed from the container before making another coat.

APPLYING GEL:

Swimmer may wish to wear a towel over their shoulders – gel can be hard to remove from clothing and bathing suits if it drips. Using paint/basting/tooth brush, paint gel from just in front of hairline all the way the bun in long smooth strokes. Gel should extend very slightly past hairline onto forehead and neck to ensure that all fly-away hairs are gelled down.

After first coat, let gel dry until tacky before adding another coat. 2-3 coats of gel will be needed in total. Gel should look smooth and glassy – if the gel on the head starts to turn white and pull off with brush strokes you are either putting on too much gel or not letting it dry enough between coats.

If using buncover: Apply one coat of gel to the bun and then put on the buncover immediately. This helps to glue down the buncover.

If not using buncover: Apply 2-3 coats of gel to the bun.

USING LEFTOVER GEL:

Left over gel may be frozen. To use, defrost on counter or in refrigerator. Once gel is defrosted it can be heated:

- In slow cooker (heat 1.5-2 hours before needed)
- In microwave. Stop microwave every 15 seconds to stir. Do not continue to microwave after gel has been melted as the gel will boil, creating bubbles and turning your swimmer's gelled hair white!