



Gelling tips (preparation and removal)

Advance gel preparation

What you'll need (covers at least 1 head + touch ups):

- Round plastic or pyrex container with lid (not square - gel gets stuck in the corners; suggestion: Ziploc disposable 2-cup round container with screw top lid - important to have screw top for opening container full of hot gel without spilling!)
- Twelve (12) packets of **Knox** gelatin. (Do not use bulk brand gel; it dissolves in the water, i.e., when the girls are swimming!)
- plastic spoon
- 1½-inch paint or basting or hair colour application brush
- slow cooker or pan of boiling water

You may prepare a smaller or larger quantity of gel by using the ratio of 4 packets of gel to ⅓ cup water. Leftover gel may be frozen and defrosted on counter and reheated for re-use.

Empty 12 packets of Knox gelatin into appropriately sized slow cooker or small round Ziploc container and then add 1 cup lukewarm tap water. SLOWLY and very gently stir the water and gel powder with a spoon. (Stirring slowly is key to avoiding unwanted bubbles and foam from developing during the mixing process). The mixture will be thick, clumpy and white.

Slow cooker method: Prepare as above, turn on heat, cover and leave for two hours, until melted and clear. Use immediately, leave in slow cooker and reheat when needed or pour into plastic container for later use. If time between preparation and use is more than a day, then store in refrigerator. If making well in advance (e.g., for the season), you can freeze the gel in Ziploc containers.

Simmering pan method: Prepare as above, place container in pan of simmering water on the stove. Stir gently, occasionally. Mixture will gradually clear from the bottom up and be yellow-brown in colour. When clear (looks like chicken stock), remove to counter and let sit 10 minutes or so. Skim off whitish film/bubbles from top. (Letting it sit 10 minutes on the counter causes this to form into a skin on top, so it's easier to remove). May be used immediately or put aside and stored for later use. If time between preparation and use is more than a day, then store in refrigerator.

How to use the pre-prepared gel:

Remove lid from container of gel; if frozen, defrost on counter. If using a mini slow cooker, place gel directly into slow cooker and turn it on; it will take a minimum 1.5-2 hours to melt gel and heat to the desired temperature. To decrease time needed, microwave gel in container until liquid and hot and pour into mini slow cooker to keep warm for use. If it cools and thickens during gelling, simply place container in the simmering water for a few minutes or in the microwave for 10-15 seconds. If heating multiple containers of gel in a large slow cooker, bring an inch of water to simmer in bottom of slow cooker and place containers of prepared gel in the water.

Recommendation:

Prepare your gel a few days before it is needed - refrigerate if preparing several days ahead. This is especially handy for early morning gelling sessions. When you are ready to do your hair, melt the gel slowly as indicated above - you will need at least 1.5-2 hours to melt the gel if you are taking it from the fridge and using the slow cooker. The slow cooker is a preferred method for preparing and melting the gel because it produces no foam/bubbles. Multiple containers can be stacked in the slow cooker for heating at the same time. (The slow cooker is portable too - take it to the pool!) Containers of gel may also be left in the slow cooker with their lids on. During application, should the gel start to cool and thicken, simply exchange the container for one from the slow cooker and continue your application, rotating containers as necessary to ensure you are always using the best (most fluid) gel, until the job is done.

Last-minute gel preparation

Alternate "Kettle method" (from an 'insider' coach who prefers this)

This method is quick, uses less gel packets per head, and is a great option at competitions where slow cookers are not allowed and the only ingredient provided in the designated gelling room is hot water.

Needed:

- 5 envelopes of gel per head
- round heat-resistant bowl
- measuring cup

- spoon

For base coat / watery coat

- Put 2 packs of gel into the bowl first
- Slowly add boiling water until all gel is wet.
- Slowly add approximately ½ cup of boiling water
- "Mush" gel (e.g., with the back of a spoon) to mix it. Don't whisk.
- Let sit for a minute to cool and thicken.

For top coat / thicker coat:

- Same steps with 3 packets of gel

Hair preparation

The ultimate secret to 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 (no lumps or bumps; ponytail in line with the top of the ears) and then divide into 3 or more braids, depending on the thickness of the hair. Wrap the braids and pin (using open hairpins) snugly into a tight bun; cover the bun with a hairnet and/or bun cover. For sensitive skin, you can apply Vaseline just in front of the hairline. If you have wisps of stray hair, dampen the hair a little more to control 'wisps' before the gelling steps.

Apply gel generously (but not too thickly), starting from just in front of the hairline and brush towards the bun in smooth even strokes. If any water gets past the hairline, you run the risk of the hair coming loose in the pool. Two to three thin coats will be more effective than one thick coat of gel. Let gel dry to a tacky state between coats. If using a headpiece, pin it in when the top coat of gel is still tacky.

Gel Removal

The best time to remove gel is when it's still wet, so if the gel has had time to dry standing in the shower for a few minutes will loosen it up again.

A few notes and tips on removing gel:

- Try not to pick at the gel when it's dry! This will just irritate your skin.
- Simply scratching the gel off in the shower around the bun is the best way to start (remove the squiggle comb first if being used). The most effective way of removing gel is simply dissolving it so try and get out as much as possible at this point.
- Remove the bun cover/ all bobby pins and hairnets and leave just the ponytail in while trying to dissolve some of the gel at the front.
- Lightly pulling a hairbrush through the hair from the hairline back to the pony tail

elastic will help remove some gel.

- Once most of the gel is gone from the front of the head, take out the ponytail and work lots of shampoo and conditioner through the hair with a hair brush.
- Working conditioner through the hair from the hairline back helps slide some of the gel out.
- Most of the gel that will get stuck and be missed is at the very front of the hairline around the temples and ears, so make sure to pay attention and scrub these spots!
- It's nearly impossible to get ALL the gel out with one shower; some residual gel may be leftover the next day but this will come out next time you shower.
- Hairnets and bun covers can be thrown out, but bobby pins, elastics and combs can be washed off and re-used.
- If you have gel that has solidified in the brush you were using for gelling, pouring boiling water over the brush will remove the leftover gel.
- If gel is stuck on any plastic spoons or containers, let it dry and then peel it off.
- Enjoy the super soft feeling of gelatin-free hair! ☺

Good Luck!