

*RFI Category and Number:*

*Effect of Grooming Standards on Women's Health RFI #9*

*RFI Question:*

*9a. Provide policies, regulations, and other directive sources that describe grooming standards for servicewomen. Include specifics that may be required for certain military specialties or working conditions, as well as any variances or allowances for racial or ethnic groups.*

*RFI Response:*

*The U.S Navy Uniform Regulations (NAVPERS 15665I), Chapter 2, provide policy and guidance for female Sailors' grooming. Female Sailors assigned to U.S. Marine Corps units who wear the Marine Corps uniform are required to abide by U.S. Marine Corps grooming standards.*

*The appropriateness of a female hairstyle is determined by its appearance and the proper wearing of Navy headwear and headgear. Hairstyles will not interfere with the proper wearing of headgear, protective masks or equipment. In spaces or environments where there are operational hazards such as rotating gear, etc., the hair may not be worn below the bottom of the collar. Hair nets are authorized for specific types of duties and authorized by the Commanding Officer.*

*Navy female grooming standards apply to all female Sailors. The quality and texture of hair (curled, waved and straight) are recognized. Several hairstyle option examples for female Sailors regardless of racial or ethnic group includes: Braids and twists, corn rows, rolls, locks, single ponytail, single braid, single bun, and french braid. Female Sailors may also wear wigs or hair/extension pieces of a natural hair color.*

*Female grooming standards exceptions include the following:*

- During group Command/Unit physical training, Commanding Officers are authorized to standardize unit policy for the relaxation of female hair grooming standards with regard to having hair secured to head (e.g., ponytails).*
- Relaxed Hair Requirement with Dinner Dress Uniforms. Female Sailors may wear their hair down and below the lower edge of the collar of the blouse, jacket, or coat when wearing the Dinner Dress Uniform.*

*Reference: Uniform Regulations, Chapter 2, Grooming Standards.*

<https://www.public.navy.mil/bupers-npc/support/uniforms/uniformregulations/chapter2/Pages/2201PersonalAppearance.aspx>

*RFI Question:*

*9b. Detail any reported or anecdotal information/data related to adverse health impacts of grooming standards, to include general standard or occupationally specific standards. Additionally, annotate which office collects such data and where it is reported.*

*RFI Response:*

*Traction alopecia is due to hair being pulled back tightly. This condition is seen in both civilian and military women who choose to wear their hair in this style and is most commonly seen in African American women. The Navy grooming standards do not dictate that women have to wear their hair in braids or at a particular tension, which increases the risk of traction alopecia.*

*To prevent traction alopecia, dermatologist recommend that patients avoid tight braids or any processing of their hair which damages the hair follicle.*

*As this is not a service specific condition, there are no service related studies or tracking correlating the grooming standards with traction alopecia.*

*RFI Question:*

*9c. Describe any health impacts noted or reported which may be specific to different ethnic or racial groups (e.g., chemical hair treatments and/or hazardous products servicewomen may utilize to comply with grooming standards).*

*RFI Response:*

*Traction alopecia is more commonly seen in African American women who have tight braids or pull their hair back tightly. A study published in 2016 in the Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology stratifies hair care and styling practices into high, moderate, and low risk categories, and outlines a diagnostic approach for traction alopecia and guidelines for conservative management.*

*Haskin A, "All hairstyles are not created equal: What the dermatologist needs to know about black hairstyling practices and the risk of traction alopecia (TA)." J Am Acad Dermatol. 2016 Sept; 75(3): 606-611.*

*Another study published in Dermatologic Clinics in 2014 found a prevalence of traction alopecia in 32% of afro-textured hair. Mimirani, P, et al. "Traction Alopecia." Dermatologic Clinics 2014; 32(2) 153-161.*

*There are no specific studies examining the Navy's population's prevalence of traction alopecia.*

*RFI Question:*

*9d. Detail any studies that have been conducted related to health impacts on servicewomen associated with grooming standards.*

*RFI Response:*

*There are no studies specific to hairstyles in Navy women. There are studies related to personal hygiene in military women, but focus upon infection risk and cleansing rather than grooming. Wardell, Wind, et al. "A Military Challenge to Managing Feminine and Personal Hygiene." J of Am Acad of Nurse Practitioners. April 2001: 13 (4): 187-193.*

*RFI Question:*

*9e. Detail any grooming standard waivers that are provided to Service members for diagnosed medical conditions.*

*RFI Response:*

*Uniform wear and grooming regulation waivers depend upon the condition of the individual. Individuals who shave and are susceptible to pseudofolliculitis barbae may receive waivers for facial shaving. Individuals with orthopedic injuries may receive temporary waivers on footwear or uniform items. Pregnant individuals with significant edema (swelling) may receive 'tennis shoe chits' that allow them to wear alternate footwear in uniform.*

*Waivers are not typically granted for hairstyles, as an individual has multiple options for hairstyles to include variations in length, bulk (not to exceed 2 inches and bun not to exceed 3 inches), wigs, extensions (of natural color or current color of hair), braids, corn rows, rolls, ponytails, and locks. Pigtails and braids that are widely spaced or protrude from the head are not authorized. Given the variety of options for hairstyles, service members typically do not require waivers for hair grooming standards, even in conditions of alopecia as they are authorized to wear alternative hairstyles or even a wig should they desire.*

*Man hours Expended Answering this RFI: Nine hours*

*POC or office responsible: N13X, OPNAV N1, Uniform Matters Office and Office of Women's Health, Bureau of Medicine and Surgery, M332*