



*Show your hair
some love this*

VALENTINE'S DAY

For many women of colour, managing your 'do' can take a lot of time, money and effort. No doubt many of us have reached the point where we've thought about chopping it off and going natural – but something has held us back.

Well, Nadia Johnstone-Abrahams is one woman who was not held back. A few years ago she decided to ditch the weave, cut her locks off and embrace her natural style – and all just six weeks before her wedding. Here's her hair-raising tale:

So Nadia – what made you go for the chop?

I know this might sound a bit strange, but a big part of it was my genuine curiosity to see how it would turn out. From the age of about 15 I'd had the weaves, the chemical colours and straightening and I was getting bored of trying to have my hair how I thought it 'should' look. I wanted to be a woman who embraced my natural 'fro so I started looking online for ideas. My older sister had also decided to go natural about three years ago, and had been trying to convince me to do the same. It was only when I saw a magazine cover that featured Oprah proudly wearing her natural hair that I thought 'what the heck!' I wanted to start from scratch so I walked into a barber shop on Sunday 5 February 2012 and shaved it all off. That was six weeks before my wedding.

Wow – just before your wedding, that was brave! What was the reaction?

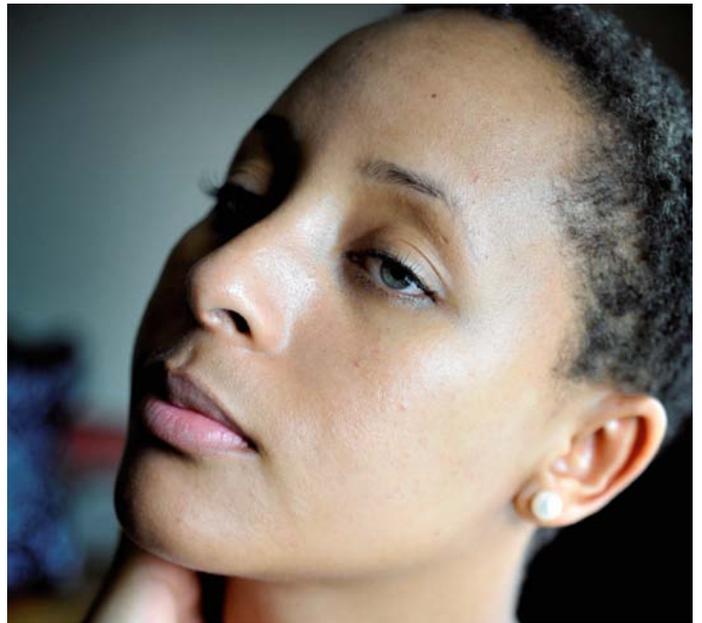
To be honest, the person whose opinion mattered most was mine. I hope that doesn't sound selfish, but it's true. My now husband wasn't convinced it was a great idea, but he still showed up to the wedding so it can't have been that bad!

My two older sisters had already cut their hair off, so it wasn't particularly shocking for my family. The best (or worst) reaction was from my young niece who burst into tears. She was convinced that I was going to be a princess on my wedding day and that a princess had to have long hair. That confirmed in my mind that I was doing the right thing by showing her the beauty that her natural hair could have.

That was almost two years ago – and I've not regretted it for a minute. Initially I joked with my husband that we could now get great deals when we go to the barbers together on 2 for 1 haircuts. But seriously, I would encourage anyone thinking about it to go for it! Since then, I've let it grow and now I have a natural afro – which can range from being huge when I've just blowdried it, to tightly coiled and tiny when washed. I love seeing my colleague's faces at the ombudsman when I come into with huge hair or when I have a new hair-do and I definitely feel like it suits my personality more. I love the diversity/versatility my hair offers

Tell us about your hair before you went natural.

When I was younger, at school in Zimbabwe, we weren't allowed to do anything with our hair. It was very strict so as soon as I left, I rebelled! I tried all sorts of funky styles from dark brown to blonde (and an orangery colour in-between). At one stage it was even pink! I find it really nice to know that my hair is totally natural now. It's not exposed to any of the chemicals or toxins that I used to use. In fact, I even wash my hair with natural products like honey and yogurt.



Of course, the other thing is that trying to wrestle your hair into braids is often hard work. I look at other women of colour spending hours having it fussed over and think "I really don't have the time" – I'm able to get up and head out to work or to meet my friends in a lot less time compared to some women.

Any advice?

I think, when it comes to our hair, a lot of us want what we don't have – if it's straight, we want it curly and if it's long, we want it short. I think that, more and more, we're seeing women of colour who are feeling comfortable with their natural hair. More celebrities than ever these are going for the chop or showing off their natural afro. So I would just encourage every woman to love what is naturally yours – it's often that way because it suits you much more.

Nadia's not only hair savvy; she's money savvy as well. She works for the Financial Ombudsman – the free service that helps you sort out all kinds of money problems. So if you're pulling your hair out over a bank or insurance company she knows how you can get things sorted. Here's Nadia's tips on getting complaints sorted out:

- 1 Contact the business at the first sign of a problem, whether it's a direct debit you know you won't be able to pay or a potential insurance claim – let them know as soon as possible
- 2 Be clear about what you want if you've lost money, say how much you want back, if the business has done something wrong say what you want it to do to put it right.
- 3 Stay calm no matter how distressed you get. It will help get things sorted much quicker.
- 4 Refer it up if the person you're speaking to can't help, say you want to make a formal complaint.
- 5 Contact the ombudsman if you're not happy with your answer from the bank, insurer or lender, give us a call **0300 123 9 123.**