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HOW TO CHOOSE A GEL SYSTEM

The most popular nail system in Europe, gels are experiencing a renaissance in the US with many innovative new systems now available. Gels offer a dazzling array of glosses, colors and nail art. Gels can be used on tips, sculpted on nail forms or used on natural nails. A basic gel system offers a nail bed treatment, a builder gel that evens out ridges and refines the C-curve, and a glossy top layer. Opaque and sheer colored gels function as extremely durable polish. Traditional gels require curing in a UV lamp to harden. Application brushes, cleaner and files are also necessary items. To choose the best gel system for your salon, keep these tips in mind:

Phases

Gels are applied in layers, each of which must be cured in a UV lamp for anywhere from 90 seconds to six minutes.

One- or two-phase formulation gels minimize curing time for a very fast manicure. These gels tend to have a thicker viscosity to fill ridges and build the C-curve as well as provide a glossy finish. Multi-phase gels have the advantage of very thin viscosity for imbedding glitter and nail art, or for layering color. A good one- or two-phase gel with medium viscosity such as YOU Switzerland® VIP Gel Aqua from Backscratchers is a versatile product for a wide variety of gel applications.

Odor and Primers

Most gels have low or no odor. Primers tend to have a very strong acrid smell, which can be detrimental to your salon's atmosphere. You can offer gel treatments and still create a spa-like atmosphere in your salon by avoiding the use of gel systems that include primers.

Filing

Gels require much less filing than acrylics, making your manicures faster and easier.

Maintenance

Gels are generally less damaged by day-to-day wear and tear than traditional acrylics, so clients need fills and repairs less frequently. Gels tend to move with the nail bed – no painful cracking or shattering to repair. Gel fills are generally higher priced in the marketplace, so despite having fewer fill visits, a technician can maintain her profit levels.

Sanitation

As with all nail services, salon sanitation practices must be followed to protect you and your clients from cross-contamination. Clean your tools and workspace with appropriate antimicrobial cleansers such as Cavicide®, and use antibacterial cleaners such as Backscratchers Hygienic Elegance® to sanitize and pH-balance your client's nails and hands prior to any services.

Self-leveling

Gravity can work against you with gels thickening on one side of the nail during curing. Correcting this requires taking the time for additional filing. A self-leveling gel such as YOU Switzerland VIP Gel Aqua from Backscratchers has ingredients that eliminate or reduce this problem, and most gel systems also recommend curing fingers or at least thumbs individually to ensure a level result. Self-leveling gels also save you time during application and cut down on filing time – the product does not shift on the nail, which gives you much more ease with brush strokes.

Clarity

Artificial enhancements look more natural if they are very clear. Non-yellowing, gels hold their clarity from salon to fill. One of the most exciting qualities of gels is sculpting transparent nail tips with colorless gels, which can also be embedded with glitter or other nail art. Poor clarity can cause shadowing or hazy opacity.



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Curing

Gels have a reputation of taking a long time to cure, but this isn't necessarily the case with today's new gel products and UV lamps. Older lamps may only offer a 7- to 9-watt bulb, while new lamps offer up to 36 watts of UV light. The higher the wattage, and the closer the nail to the light, the faster the cure time. A 9-watt lamp may take three to six minutes to cure a single layer of gel, while a 36-watt lamp may cure the same layer in two minutes or less. UV bulbs have a lifespan of about six months, and then begin to wane in power. If it is taking longer to cure gels than usual, it's likely time to change your bulbs. Keep extra bulbs on hand, and even keep an extra lamp on hand in case of some unexpected malfunction.

The chemical reaction that causes UV light to harden gels can cause a sensation of heat on the nail bed. This can surprise a client, and while generally tolerable, a fast rise in temperature can be uncomfortable. A technician should advise her client that there may be a sensation of heat, and cure a layer with more exposures for shorter periods of time if the client experiences discomfort. Some gel systems claim low or no heat, but some warmth should be expected from any gel.

Compatibility

Avoid mixing manufacturer's products – system components are designed to be used together to achieve optimum results. If you choose a gel system with a wide selection of builders, glosses and colored gels you can offer an endless variety of manicures.

Gloss

Gels can retain high-shine – even wet-look – glossiness for days longer than acrylics without dulling or chipping. A one- or two-phase gel that offers a high gloss can save steps in the application as well, or be offered as a topcoat treatment for an additional price.

Brushes and Cleaners

Natural hair brushes work well with most gels, and are available from many manufacturers. Disposable brushes are also handy and can prevent cross contamination. Do keep brushes away from the light unit and sunlight so that the brushes do not harden.

Cost

When evaluating the cost of adding a gel system to your menu, keep in mind how versatile this nail system can be. Gels can be easily incorporated into existing salon services – for example a colored gel can be used for a durable pedicure, while all gel products can be incorporated into gel art. These can be presented as luxury services at additional price points on your menu. Many manufacturers also have sample menus available with the purchase of their products or on their websites that you can incorporate into your own salon services.

Viscosity and Opacity

Viscosity, the thickness and spreadability of the gel, governs how many layers you will need. Thin viscosity gels are excellent for design work and topcoats, while thicker gels work best as sculpting or base gels.

Opacity, how transparent a gel is, determines both the final appearance of the nail as well as curing time. Very opaque gels can work to create perfect French manicures over stained or discolored nails. However, the more opaque a gel is, the longer it will take to cure.



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