

Getting in a right lather

For a brief second the other night, *Coro St* lifted from its depressing fog and referred to something truly significant to all households – soap versus gel.

In a rare comic moment, Tim and Sally had a set-to over his insistence bar soap is better than gel in the shower because it lathers more easily and it's, well, cheaper. Left unsaid was what's probably lurking in the minds of most males, if it lurks at all, and that's tradition: we've always used soap and that's the way it's gonna stay.

I'm a soap man. How could I be anything else, when I think back to childhood when showers were a rarity (you got scalded if someone turned on a kitchen tap) and cleanliness was sort of achieved in a bath containing murky water already used by someone else and which left a tide mark that was a bugger to scrub off if you were unlucky enough to be last in.

Gel? Never heard of it.

Until now. Well, before now, actually, but I blocked my ears whenever Lin brought it up in conversations about keeping the shower and its glass wall free of that mysterious white stuff that builds up along the bottom and after a while is nearly impossible to remove.

It's the soap, she said. My soap. She uses gel, and has done since it was invented, I would guess. Gel doesn't leave deposits. With gel, you don't have to go through a bottle of shower cleaner spray every month.

I relented and tried gel. Once. It was bloody useless. No lather. Impossible to get onto the bottom of your feet. Smells funny. Nah. I'm a soap man, always will be.

Until the epiphany. Sally and Tim got me thinking: was I being pigheaded and selfish, unwilling to admit my daily efforts to remove evidence of the soap habit weren't really that effective?

Research helped. Gel has been around longer than I thought, its progenitor, liquid soap, since the 1800s. The *Guardian* reports we neglect our skin. The wrong soap dries it out, and leaving soap lying around in shower dishes harbours bacteria.

That information will encourage us to man up over this, a sentiment that doesn't apply if you're "new age" (a god-like status that's been around so long it's becoming "middle age") because for years, new-agers will have been putting their haloes aside and cleaning the whole bathroom (not just the loo); they already use gel.

The manning up needs to be done by us soapers, so I've made more than a token effort this time. And after a few days I noticed the scum deposits have disappeared from the shower stall. Cleaning can be done without water-blasting or anyone having to get on their knees with a scrubbing brush and exposing themselves to the rigours of Janola.

But if you do decide to switch be prepared to adjust, because becoming a gel-er isn't straight-forward. You'll start off emptying half the bottle trying to get the

spectacular lather a soap bar gives. Instead, try small squirts onto the tips of your fingers, then applying in accordance with a strategic plan.

Accept that the soles of your feet, your belly-button and things that stick out, like ears, will need a different battle plan. Orifices must be approached with thought and newly honed dexterity.

Arthritis may militate against a switch, since greater flexibility and balance are needed to get gel where you need it. I won't go into further detail in case I put people off, but suffice to say showering as effectively as before is possible with practice and a stretching regime before you start.

I'd also advise against buying the gel by yourself. Choosing from an array of seductive entreaties is treacherous territory best left to those who've navigated it for years. You know who I mean.

Switching does raise another debate. The *Guardian* reckoned concern for the environment means bar soap is making a return for the first time this century. Many gels are made from now-disgraced fossil fuels, and worse, they come in totally discredited plaster containers. If the outside world sees you buying gel bottles in the supermarket, points may be deducted.

There's always the option recommended by some expert I stumbled across – don't use soap or gel at all. Apparently we don't actually need anything. The whole damn thing was an invention of last century soap companies and their sponsorship of American radio and TV programmes.