

Why I should be concerned about the safety of personal care products

Have you ever counted how many cosmetics or personal care products you use in a day? Chances are it's nearly 10.

And what about your children?

Most people use these products without a second thought, and believe that the government must certainly be policing the safety of the mixtures.

Why should I be concerned about the safety of personal care products? Doesn't the government regulate them?

The unfortunate reality is that the government does not currently require health studies or pre-market testing for these products before they are sold. According to the FDA's Office of Cosmetics and Colors,

"FDA cannot require companies to do safety testing of their cosmetic products before manufacturing,"
and

"...a cosmetic manufacturer may use almost any raw material as a cosmetic ingredient and market the product without an approval from FDA." (FDA 1995)

FDA does no systematic reviews of safety. That means that **nearly 90% of ingredients used in personal care products have not been evaluated for safety by any publicly accountable institution.**

And as people apply an average of 126 unique ingredients on their skin daily, these chemicals, whether they seep through the skin, rinse down the drain, or flush down the toilet in human excretions, are causing concerns for human health, and for the impacts they may have to wildlife, rivers and streams.

Are ingredients in personal care products actually harmful?

While some companies make products that are safe to eat, other companies choose to use known human carcinogens or developmental toxins. Nearly all these chemicals can penetrate the skin, and some we ingest directly from our lips or hands. **More than one-third of all personal care products contain at least one ingredient linked to cancer.** When risky and unstudied chemicals are used in cosmetics, the stakes can be high — **unlike trace contaminants in food or tap water, chemicals in cosmetics are base ingredients.** When scientists published a study finding a relationship between plasticizers called phthalates and *feminization of U.S. male babies*, they named fragrance as a possible culprit. When estrogenic industrial chemicals called parabens were found in human *breast tumor tissue* earlier this year, researchers questioned if deodorant was the source.

Why?

Industrial chemicals are basic ingredients in personal care products.

No premarket safety testing required.

Everyone uses personal care products.

Safer Shopping Tips

1. **Use the EWG [What Not To Buy list](#)** to avoid especially problematic ingredients — like mercury, lead, and placenta — and the products that contain them.
2. **Use fewer products.** Is there something you can cut from your daily routine, or a product you can use less often? By cutting down on the number of chemicals contacting your skin every day, you will reduce any potential health risks associated with your products.
3. **Use the EWG ["Advanced Search"](#)** feature of Skin Deep to find products that have fewer potential health issues. Choose a product category and exclude the hazardous ingredients — carcinogens and neurotoxins, for instance — and Skin Deep will generate a custom shopping list for you.
4. **Read labels.** Marketing claims on personal care products are not defined under the law, and can mean anything or nothing at all, including claims like organic, natural, hypoallergenic, animal cruelty free, and fragrance free. Read the ingredient label carefully to find evidence that the claims are true.

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5. **Use milder soaps.** Soap removes dirt and grease from the surface of your skin, but also strips away your body's own natural skin oils. Choosing a milder soap may reduce skin dryness and your need for moisturizers to replace oils your skin can provide naturally.
6. **Minimize your use of dark hair dyes.** Many contain coal tar ingredients that have been linked to cancer in some studies.
7. **Cut down on your use of powders;** avoid the use of baby powder on newborns and infants. A number of ingredients common in powder have been linked to cancer and other lung problems when they are inhaled. FDA warns that powders may cause lung damage if inhaled regularly.
8. **Choose products that are "fragrance"-free.** Fragrances can cause allergic reactions. Products that claim to be "fragrance free" on the packaging may not be. They could contain masking fragrances that give off a neutral odor. Read the ingredient label — in products truly free of fragrance, the word "fragrance" will not appear there.
9. **Reduce your use of nail polish.** It's one of the few types of products that routinely contains ingredients linked to birth defects. Paint your toenails and skip the fingernails. Paint nails in a well-ventilated room, or outside, or avoid using nail polish altogether, particularly when you are pregnant. Browse our custom shopping guide for advice on nail polishes that contain fewer ingredients of concern.

What Not To Buy

- **Placenta**, used as a conditioner – high in hormones, endocrine disruptor
- **Lead**, used as a coloring – Neurotoxin, damages brain
- **Mercury**, used as a preservative – Neurotoxin, damages brain
- **Fragrance**, in nearly every product – Allergens, Neurotoxins, Contain multiple toxic chemicals
- **Animal Parts**, used as emollients (mink, emu) – Contain concentrated toxins
- **Hydroquinone Skin Lighteners**, used to lighten and even skin tone – Cause disfiguring skin diseases
- **Nano-Particle Skin Penetrators**, used to carry active ingredients – Penetrate organs carrying toxins with
- **Phthalates**, plasticizers used for softening – Reproductive and developmental toxins
- **Petroleum Byproducts**, used as cheap emollients and base ingredients – Cancer causing

Ingredients to avoid always:

- | | |
|--|---|
| • 2-BROMO-2-NITROPROPANE-1,3-DIOL
Allergen that forms cancer-causing chemicals | • TRICLOSAN
May disrupt growth hormones from the thyroid |
| • BHA
Causes skin depigmentation | • BORIC ACID & SODIUM BORATE
Unsafe for infants according to industry experts |
| • DMDM HYDANTOIN
Allergen that forms cancer-causing chemicals | • DIBUTYL PHTHALATE & TOLUENE
Found in nail polish/play makeup; hormone disruption, cancer concerns |
| • OXYBENZONE
Allergen; forms free radicals to damage skin | |

Ingredients to avoid when possible:

- | | |
|---|---|
| • FRAGRANCE
Allergen; neurotoxic, hormone disruption concerns | • TRIETHANOLAMINE (TEA)
Allergen that forms cancer-causing chemicals |
| • DYES
Some cause cancer and are banned outside the U.S. | • BENZYL & ISOPROPYL ALCOHOL
Skin irritation and neurotoxicity concerns |
| • FLUORIDE
Teeth stains; neurotoxic when swallowed | • METHYLCHLOROISOTHIAZOLINONE & METHYLISOTHIAZOLINONE
Allergens with neurotoxicity concerns |
| • CETEARETH & PEG compounds
Can contain cancer-causing impurities | • IODOPROPYNYL BUTYLCARBAMATE
Chemically similar to neurotoxic pesticides |
| • PARABENS
Hormone disruption, cancer concerns | |

*All information is courtesy of Environmental Working Group's Skin Deep section. www.ewg.org. Check it out!