

HEALTH AND COSMETIC SAFETY

CHEMICAL INGREDIENTS: THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE UGLY

Are all chemicals bad?

Not all chemicals are bad for us. Our body is made up of chemicals, and so is everything else, including food and water. Toxic chemicals, however, are bad for us. “Toxic” means those chemicals that can harm cells or organs, cause neurological damage, and/or alter important biological systems.

How Do Toxic Chemicals Enter Our Bodies?

Toxic chemicals can enter our bodies in different ways. In the case of cosmetics, toxic chemicals can enter our bodies directly through our airways when we inhale particles from powders and sprays, and through our skin, lips and nails when we apply products. We know that even small doses of ingredients can have a big effect when absorbed through the skin, as is seen in the growing popularity of patches applied to the skin containing medication such as nicotine and birth control.

Are even small amounts of toxic chemicals in cosmetics a problem?

Yes, because small amounts add up. On average, women use 12 cosmetics a day and men use 6, each with dozens of ingredients. In addition, we experience environmental exposures to toxic chemicals through food, air, water, and consumer products.

Even tiny amounts of some chemicals used in everyday products can have huge impacts. Endocrine disruptors, which are chemicals like BPA, parabens and phthalates that mimic or block hormones, can have major health impacts because they mirror the function of our real hormones.

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Are skincare and makeup products made in the U.S. safe?

Not necessarily. Many cosmetics companies think of our health and safety in a very short-term context, working to avoid acute reactions, such as a rash or irritated eyes. Very few companies, however, are paying attention to our long-term health. Right now in the U.S., it is completely legal for companies to use toxic chemicals in the products that we put on our bodies every day – even if the ingredients are known to cause cancer or other health problems. Of course, there are several companies that strive to make safer products. One of our favorite resources for learning more about a particular product’s safety is the *Environmental Working Group’s Skin Deep* cosmetic database.

Doesn’t the government make sure products are safe?

No. The U.S. law that governs the \$60 billion cosmetics industry was passed in 1938, and does not provide the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) with the power to ask cosmetic companies for safety data or issue recalls of cosmetics found to be unsafe.

Aren’t products imported from other countries less safe than U.S.-made products?

No. The domestic cosmetics industry has very few regulations. In the U.S., only 11 ingredients are restricted or banned from cosmetics. The European Union (EU) bans 1,300 ingredients from cosmetics. Products from the EU and Japan, which also has more health-protective regulation than the U.S., are often made with fewer harmful or untested ingredients.

Are you saying that my lipstick or body lotion may give me cancer?

It isn’t that simple. The chemicals present in any one cosmetic are unlikely to cause serious harm but chemicals from the products we wear everyday can accumulate in our bodies and prove harmful over time. None of us use just one product. Think about how many products you use in a single day and how many products you use in a year, and over a lifetime.

I don’t wear very much makeup, so I’m probably safe, right?

This issue extends beyond makeup into almost all products we use on our bodies every day to look or feel cleaner or more beautiful: shampoo, lotion, aftershave, cologne, even baby shampoo.

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Is it possible for cosmetics to work without chemicals?

Yes. There are many alternative nontoxic ingredients available today that work just as well – and often times perform far better – than their commonly used counterparts.

BEAUTYCOUNTER: MOVING THE BEAUTY INDUSTRY FORWARD

How does Beautycounter choose ingredients?

In order to ensure that every Beautycounter product meets our high performance standard without compromising health, we have established an Ingredient Selection Process that is the one of the strictest in the industry.

Beautycounter fully supports research initiatives to learn more about ingredient safety, and work with green chemists to find new, safer ingredients and solutions.

What do natural, organic, green and safe mean when it comes to cosmetics?

Legally? Nothing. Due to major loopholes in federal law, cosmetics can be labeled “natural,” “sustainable,” and nearly any other word that comes to mind without containing ingredients that accurately meet those descriptions. Even products certified as organic can contain as little as 10% organic ingredients, depending on the certifier.

“Safe” is not a standardized term, either. The Food and Drug Administration’s Office of Cosmetics and Colors (the agency that is in charge of regulating all cosmetics) does not define safety. Some cosmetics companies consider carcinogens, though they are known to cause harm, safe to use in products because they are legal.

Beautycounter selects dozens of natural, naturally derived and some organic ingredients. We look forward to increasing our organic ingredients over time, though always with safety, performance and affordability in mind.

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Why does Beautycounter talk about transparency and ingredient disclosure?

We believe you have the right to know everything about what goes into our products and we make our labels easy to read. However there are three main obstacles that may prevent you from learning about what goes into other products on the market:

- 1** “Fragrance” is considered a trade secret, so companies don’t have to disclose what it is. Usually, it is a synthetic concoction that includes phthalates and synthetic musks, which are hormone disruptors, as well as chemicals that are allergens and neurotoxins.
- 2** Some chemicals are not intentionally added to products, but are the result of chemical reactions happening inside the bottle of product (formaldehyde in shampoo), or contaminants (lead in lipstick). Companies usually know that these toxins will be in the finished products, but do not list them on ingredient labels as they are not required to do so.
- 3** When manufacturing companies buy bulk ingredients from ingredient suppliers (aloe vera gel, or grapefruit seed extract), they are often getting an already-preserved raw ingredient (aloe vera gel with added phenoxyethanol, or grapefruit seed extract with added methylparaben). But the end product does not have to list these preservatives, so a preservative-free or paraben-free product may contain those chemicals after all.

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What are parabens and phthalates?

Parabens and phthalates are endocrine (or hormone) disruptors, meaning they can alter important hormonal mechanisms in our bodies.

Parabens are a class of preservative used in many skincare and makeup products to prevent the growth of bacteria and mold. There are methylparaben, isobutylparaben, propylparaben and others, but essentially, you want to avoid anything ending in -paraben, since they mimic estrogen and may play a role in triggering cancer and other serious health issues.

Phthalates (pronounced THAL-lates) are plasticizers – they make plastic more pliable (think shower curtains) and are a huge component of PVC plastic, which is one of the more toxic plastics. In cosmetics, phthalates are used to make fragrances stick to skin, styling products malleable, and nail polish bend and stick to the curve of your nail.

They are thought to block signaling pathways for hormones like testosterone, and have been linked to birth defects. Like parabens, there are many kinds of phthalates (the ones used in cosmetics are abbreviated as DBP and DEHP), but since they don't often appear on ingredient labels, they can be tricky to avoid. This is one of the big reasons that Beautycounter advocates for full disclosure of all ingredients.

It is important to try to avoid ingredients like these and others that are on our Never List [LINK], but it is just as important to know the ingredients companies use to replace them. That is why Beautycounter puts so much emphasis on the ingredients that we do use, and why we will always tell you what is in our products and why these ingredients are there.

Our *Health and Cosmetic Safety* FAQ is growing all the time. If you would like to know more about a particular issue, please feel free to contact us at info@beautycounter.com.