

Handout for Ageless Beauty

Here are some common questions I get asked about makeup and personal care products:

1) What chemicals should I avoid when buying sunscreen and are there any safe sunscreen brands?

First, there are lots of other options besides using sunscreens to protect yourself from getting burned this summer, like wearing protective clothing, finding shade, and avoiding noon sun. Plus, there's no consensus that sunscreen prevents skin cancer and in some cases it's been shown to actually increase your risk! If you do use sunscreen, make sure what you put on your skin is safe and effective.

One great resource for information on safe sunscreens is the new 2012 Sunscreen Guide put out by [The Environmental Working Group \(EWG\)](#), a nonprofit research organization based in Washington, DC. Its scientists analyzed 500 sunscreens and reported that only 8%, or 39 were safe and effective. They found false advertising, unproven claims by manufacturers, and ingredients that haven't been tested for safety.

EWG recommends the following when buying sunscreen:

- Don't be fooled by high SPF. Anything higher than "SPF 50+" can tempt you to stay in the sun too long, suppressing sunburn but not other kinds of skin damage. The FDA says these numbers are misleading.
- Avoid Vitamin A-laced creams listed as "retinyl palmitate" on the label. New government data show that tumors and lesions develop sooner on skin coated with vitamin A.
- Avoid the chemical oxybenzone, a synthetic estrogen that penetrates the skin and contaminates the body.

- Look for active ingredients zinc, titanium, avobenzone or Mexoryl SX. These substances protect skin from harmful UVA radiation and remain on the skin, with little if any penetrating into the body.
- Skip sunscreens with insect repellent – if you need bug spray, buy it separately and apply it first.
- Avoid sprays and powders which cloud the air with tiny particles of sunscreen that may not be safe to breathe. Choose creams instead.

2) Is all makeup dangerous for my health? Which brands should I avoid and which brands are safe?

Makeup has been around for centuries, but not the kind we put on ourselves today. Modern makeup is largely chemically-based and to a large extent has never been tested for safety. Out of all those expensive perfumes at the beauty counter for example, almost none uses natural essences – they're made from chemicals rather than flowers. If you've ever walked into an empty room or elevator and could still smell the cologne of someone who'd left, you can bet that it was made from a synthetic fragrance because unlike natural flower essences, synthetic chemicals have a strong, long-lasting smell.

Many untested chemicals that we put on our skin go in our skin as well. Some of these chemicals that are in our make-up and skin creams are the very same ones used in industrial manufacturing to soften plastics, clean equipment and stabilize pesticides. Some, known as endocrine disruptors, can work in subtle ways by disrupting the body's ability to produce adequate quantities of hormones or by interfering with the body's hormonal pathways.

Again, become a good label reader and know that like ingredients on food packaging, labels on cosmetics are written in descending order, so the first ingredients on the list make up the majority of the product. Manufacturers may add some natural ingredients to make their product seem natural, but if you see the good stuff listed last instead of first, there could be less than one percent

that's actually natural, and the rest being nasty chemicals. Keep it simple and buy products with the fewest and safest ingredients possible.

I have a list of safe cosmetics in my book "Super Natural Home." You can also check the website www.safecosmetics.org for reviews and ratings on cosmetics. In general, the makeup you'll find at stores like Whole Foods or Pharmaca will be much safer than those found in department stores and drug stores.

3) What ingredients should I avoid the most when buying body-care products?

I think one of the most important things to avoid is the word "fragrance" on the label. It's a manufacturer's catch word that can mean there's up to 100 synthetic chemicals in the product. Fragrances can contain neurotoxins and are among the top 5 allergens in the world. A recent Mayo Clinic study placed fragrances in the 10 most common causes of allergic contact dermatitis, and the Institute of Medicine (a division of the National Academy of Sciences) placed fragrance in the same category as second hand smoke in triggering asthma in adults and school age children.

Also, since most of us buy commercially made body-care products produced in a lab, it's important to be aware of these three, potentially harmful chemicals found in most:

Phthalates (pronounced thalates) help soften things like plastic toys, vinyl floor tiles, glues and inks, and in body-care products they are found in deodorant, lotions and fragrance and referenced on the label merely as "other." Exposure to phthalates is known to cause reproductive problems and hormone disruption in humans and can harm the development of fetuses and children. Hundreds of animal studies have shown that phthalates can damage the liver, kidneys, lungs and the reproductive system.

Parabens (alkyl-p-hydroxybenzoates) are chemicals found in most commercially made soap and shampoo. They are used as antimicrobial preservatives in more than 13,000 cosmetic products. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) states that all parabens – methyl, propyl, and butyl – are endocrine disruptors.

DEA (Diethanolamine), (also derivatives such as cocamide DEA/ Lauramide DEA, and MEA) which is used as a wetting, thickening and foaming agent in shampoos, bath products (including baby wash), liquid hand soaps shaving products, and deodorants. This group of chemicals has been shown to interfere with normal brain development in baby mice when applied to the skin of pregnant mice.

Also, the chemical 1,4-Dioxane has shown up in many bodycare products, including “natural” ones. The Organic Consumer Association (OCA) urges consumers to search ingredient lists for words ending in the letters “eth” like “myreth,” “oleth,” “laureth,” “cetareth.” Plus, watch out for “PEG,” “polyethylene,” “polyethylene glycol,” “polyoxyethylene,” or “oxynol.”

4) Is underarm antiperspirant and deodorant really bad for you and why?

Antiperspirants block sweat from escaping through underarm pores onto the skin. Most conventional products contain aluminum which is linked to Alzheimer’s disease. This heavy metal can travel into the lymphatic system under our armpits. If the hair was recently shaved, the skin will have microscopic nicks, allowing chemicals to enter more easily. Aside from aluminum, most antiperspirants contain parabens, antimicrobial agents derived from toluene, a toxic petrochemical derivative. Some studies say that repeated exposure to toluene may cause hormone disruption. Plus, parabens act like the hormone estrogen in the body. Deodorants neutralize the smell of perspiration. They are healthier than antiperspirants but many brands contain

potentially toxic ingredients like parabens, aluminum and synthetic fragrance.

Also watch out for:

- Propylene glycol: a penetration enhancer also found in antifreeze.
- Talc: a possible carcinogen.
- Steareth, which is processed with ethylene oxide (ethoxylated), a known human carcinogen.
- Triclosan: an antibacterial that is creating resistant bacteria.

My Tips:

- Read labels and choose paraben-free, aluminum-free options.
- Watch out for (and avoid) propylene glycol as the main ingredient -- even on so called "natural" products.
- Try baking soda as a deodorant. Put the non-aluminum variety into a salt shaker and pat under your armpits.
- Ozonated olive oil is another great alternative. It can last for days!

c Beth Greer 2013