



CENTER FOR EARTH LEADERSHIP FACT SHEETS

Personal Care Products

Many of us look outside the home for the source of hazardous chemicals in our lives, but most of our exposure occurs indoors from products we use every day. Shampoo, deodorant, lotion, hand soap, and cosmetics are virtually unregulated by the government and can contain chemicals that build up in our bodies and the environment. Rates of cancer, ADHD, early puberty, and low sperm counts are on the rise, and one source of exposure is personal care products.

PRODUCTS OF CONCERN

There are some products that deserve special attention:

- Most permanent hair dyes and some bleaches contain cancer-causing substances, such as coal-tar dyes, lead, and phenylenediamine.
- Nail polish and remover are among the most toxic cosmetic products. They may contain carcinogens, neurotoxins, and hormone disruptors.
- Makeup, such as lipstick, blush, eye shadow, and mascara, may contain some of the chemicals in the list below, such as parabens.
- Anti-bacterial soaps and some deodorants and toothpastes contain the pesticide triclosan, which can lead to resistant bacteria that reduce the effectiveness of antibiotics. It is also toxic to aquatic organisms. Regular soap and water is adequate.
- Sunscreens contain some risky chemicals, particularly oxybenzone (benzophenone-3). See <http://www.ewg.org/whichsunscreensarebest/2009report> and <http://safemama.com/2010/04/09/safemamas-2010-safer-sunscreen-cheat-sheet>.

READ LABELS

It's not always easy to read ingredient labels, but if you can, scan for the following chemicals, which have been shown to cause negative health effects or to build up in our bodies or the environment over time. You can also check specific products or ingredients on the Skin Deep database, <http://www.cosmeticsdatabase.com/>. See <http://www.watoxics.org/files/cosmetics.pdf> for more information.

- Fragrances in perfumes, colognes, after-shave lotions, and other scented products may contain reproductive toxins, neurotoxins, and carcinogens. They are among the top five allergens in the world. Look for the word "fragrance" in deodorant, soap, makeup, hair products, and skin care products.

- Parabens, some of which are considered a high health hazard, are found in tens of thousands of products as a preservative.
- Phthalates (including BHT), which cause birth defects, don't always appear on labels, but a study commissioned by three consumer groups found them in deodorants, fragrances, hair gels, mousses, and hair sprays. See http://www.safecosmetics.org/downloads/NotTooPretty_report.pdf.
- Formaldehyde, a known carcinogen, is found in liquid hand soap, styling gel, and nail polish. It also may not be listed as an ingredient, but it may show up as a contaminant or breakdown product of preservatives in shampoo, facial cleanser, sunscreen, mascara, and eye shadow.
- Mercury is found in the preservative thimerosal (in some mascaras).
- Petroleum distillates may be listed as "petroleum" or "paraffin." They are found in mascara and some foundations.
- Some DEAs such as diethanolamin and cocamide DEA, which are toxic to humans, may show up in sunscreen, shampoo, and skin cleansers.

CHOOSE ALTERNATIVES

If all these chemicals make you dizzy, perhaps the easiest solution is to use simple products that you know are safe. Start with fragrance free products, or consider pure essential oils for fragrance. Think outside the box too: jojoba, almond, or olive oil can be used on the skin, a mineral stone can replace deodorant, and a hat and long sleeves can substitute for chemical sun block. If you prefer commercial products, patronize the companies that have signed the Compact for Safe Cosmetics, www.safecosmetics.org. These companies have pledged to ensure that their personal care products will meet the standards set by the European Union cosmetics directive to be free of chemicals that are known or strongly suspected of causing cancer, mutation, or birth defects. Small, local companies are less likely to use preservatives. At your favorite natural food store, ask for products from companies such as Wild Carrot Herbals or Servello. Or if you are adventuresome, make your own. See *Organic Body Care Recipes* by Stephanie Tourles.