

[IMAGE]

## Face the Facts

By Rita Woods

Many women start their day with a healthy application of makeup. But just how healthy is it? Learn what to look for when choosing makeup and other products - in particular, which ingredients can do more harm than good.

The Federal Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act defines cosmetics as items intended to be applied to the human body for cleansing, beautifying, promoting attractiveness or altering one's appearance without affecting the body's structure or functions. This definition includes skin-care creams, lotions, powders and sprays, perfumes, lipsticks, fingernail polishes, eye and facial makeup, permanent waves, hair colors, deodorants, baby products, bath oils, bubble baths, and mouthwashes, as well as any material intended for use as a component of a cosmetic product.

As you can imagine, we are exposed to hundreds of these products each day. How do we know if what we are using is harmful? Well, just like the names of the thousands of chemicals that make up most of these items, it's not that simple.

Several ingredients in our personal care products have come under fire recently thanks to the work of avid watchdog groups such as the Environmental Work Group ([www.ewg.org](http://www.ewg.org)). One chemical in particular comes from the family of "phthalates" (pronounced THAY-lates). This one has prompted the state of California to ban its use in toys and baby products beginning in 2009. This is important to you because it can be hidden in your personal care products, too. Yes, hidden. Here's how.

In general, phthalates are known as plasticizers. There are eight members of this family and they are used in just about every industry in the world to make plastic pliable. Things like garbage bags, garden hoses and such are pliable thanks, in part, to the phthalates. Another important thing they do is to make the scent last longer in products. This feature puts them in our personal care products: makeup, nail polish, body washes, laundry soap, dryer sheets and shampoo, just to name a few.

But here's the catch - you won't see phthalates listed as an ingredient. They will be listed as a part of the fragrance ingredient which is exempt from the same labeling laws. Full disclosure of "fragrance" may jeopardize company trade secrets, so the company doesn't have to divulge that information. The real problem here is that this loophole can be used to "hide" other potentially harmful ingredients. Reproductive and birth defects are a concern for people who are highly exposed. Some advocates are trying to get phthalates removed from all cosmetics, and the loophole is under investigation.

The Centers for Disease Control ran tests to examine the extent of phthalates exposure in humans. Metabolites used to gauge exposure were present in 75 percent of the cases tested - a much higher incidence than previously thought. Visit [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) for further information and details of the study on phthalates.

Another area of concern is the use of preservatives such as "methylparaben" and "propylparaben" in cosmetics. The same preservatives often are used in foods. If you eat a lot of processed foods, you could be increasing your exposure. According to most scientists, we just don't know what the long-term effects are of many chemicals. While there still is no concrete evidence they pose a health threat, there is some supportive evidence that they can elicit an allergic response in some people.

Parabens are no longer used in Japan and the U.K., so some manufacturers are reformulating to have them removed from products. However, the Cosmetic Ingredient Review Board (CIR) Expert Panel issued an amended final report on parabens in 2006, concluding that "methylparaben, ethylparaben, propylparaben, isopropylparaben, butylparaben, isobutylparaben, and benzylparaben are safe as used in cosmetics." The CIR provides information on the safety of chemical ingredients and issues safe recommended percentages of each chemical it tests. Some chemicals will be banned altogether while others must be used only within certain levels. Formulating chemists use these guidelines when they make products.

Kevin Tipps is a chemist who has been proactive in "going green" and replacing questionable ingredients with safer ones. He speaks on green cosmetic issues at symposiums and conventions for formulating chemists. "We use third-party testing labs to get our safety information," said Kevin. The CIR is only one of several he uses. He has been approached by several companies wanting to make all-organic, all-green products. The problem is they still want specific, targeted results for such things as wrinkles. Natural products are great, but it's chemistry that defines the specificity and use. The goal is to be able to create the functional product but do so with ingredients that are natural and eco-friendly. He is helping many companies make voluntary changes, but unfortunately, some companies will wait until they are regulated

and forced to change.

Some factors in daily living can complicate the exposure issue. For instance, people exposed to "toluene" (a harmful chemical found in nail polishes) are at higher risk of toluene toxicity if they drink large amounts of alcohol or take over-the-counter pain-relieving salicylates like aspirin or acetaminophen. The reason is that toluene is processed in the liver, as are these other chemicals, which then overworks the liver. It can no longer do a good job and toxicity occurs or the chance of toxicity is increased. Healthy people with healthy lifestyles are better equipped to deal with the onslaught of chemicals to which we are exposed.

Unfortunately, others, like people with certain diseases, are at greater risk of having adverse reactions.

Mary Gentry started formulating natural body-care products several years ago. Mary is a registered environmental health specialist and spent 15 years creating and developing public health policies in the U.S. and abroad. After acquiring Lyme disease, she developed sensitivities to synthetic compounds and began formulating her own products with natural and hypoallergenic ingredients. Her first product was called "veggie body butter." Seeing others with similar problems, she turned her attention to developing a business with these products. Her company now has a full line of massage and spa products geared toward people with sensitivities.

Mary encourages all of us to look at everything in our environment, not just what we put on our skin. She pointed to radon as one example. Radon is a dangerous byproduct of the natural breakdown of uranium. It's just part of our Earth's processes, yet it's extremely harmful to humans. It's easy to test for and easy to fix. In fact, 20,000 people die each year of radon-related lung cancer. Radon is a known carcinogen to humans, yet few people take it seriously or know about it.

So, what's a body to do? Here are some tips to help minimize your exposure to chemicals in the products you and your family use.

### **Learn to Read Labels**

Now is a good time to start reading cosmetic labels, if you don't already. The list of ingredients must appear on the label in descending order of predominance. The lower an ingredient is on the list, the less there is of it in that product. I have seen "fragrance" listed as high as ingredient number 22 out of 45, and I have seen it as the last ingredient. You don't have to be a chemist to figure out that either the raw product smells really bad and the manufacturer had to use a lot of fragrance to cover it up, or the fragrance may be hiding other

chemicals. While it might not be an exact science, it's still your best defense on the cosmetic aisle.

The same will work for parabens. I have seen the parabens listed about halfway through the ingredients list and I have seen them listed last. Now, you tell me, which has more parabens? It's probably the product whose label lists them about halfway down the ingredient list. That may not always be the case, but this information may help you make an educated choice.

### **Watch for "Greenwashing"**

Some companies are trying to jump onto the green wagon train when it comes to naturals and organics. You'll see them supporting cancer research and yet continuing to offer some of the most toxic cosmetics on the market. Again, [www.ewg.org](http://www.ewg.org) has listings of products and companies. Also, watch out for the color green and natural scenes in ads. It's an attempt, and an effective one, to get you to see them as part of the natural movement. Their ad may say one thing, but their ingredients could say another.

### **Check Out Other Sources**

Be open-minded and look at all sides of the story. The Environmental Protection Agency and the CDC have Web sites with consumer-friendly information. You'll also find links on their sites that will lead you to lists of known and probable carcinogens.

### **Get and Stay Healthy**

Make healthier choices about the foods you eat. Get plenty of exercise. Reduce your use of perfumed laundry soaps. Use dryer balls instead of dryer sheets. Wear less makeup. Become aware of the chemicals in your home and work to reduce their impact on you, your family and the environment. We may not be able to control what goes in products - but we can control what products we use.

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