

1. Read 2. Rinse 3. Repeat

What you need to know about the products you use every day

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1. Read 2. Rinse 3. Repeat: What you need to know about the products you use every day

SHAMPOO

What you need to know: Shampoos are among the products most often reported to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, according to The Safe Shopper's Bible, which says the most common complaints have to do with scalp irritation and stinging eyes. Among other things, mixtures can contain harsh detergents -- ammonium lauryl sulfate, diethanolamine lauryl sulfate DEA, to name just two cited by authors Samuel Epstein and David Steinman. Most brands will include parabens, chemical preservatives that are thought to mimic estrogen and a small study found parabens in the tumours of women with breast cancer. Some dandruff and scalp treatments contain coal tar, a known carcinogen. Many products include "fragrance," an umbrella term for potentially hundreds of different chemicals.

For your shopping cart: Choose mild or gentle cleansers. Select brands that are free of synthetic fragrances, which will immediately reduce your exposure to chemicals. This advice applies to all personal-care products.

If you're looking for organic or chemical-free brands, ignore product claims and check the label for synthetic preservatives. The Guide to Less Toxic Products www.lesstoxicguide.ca includes recipes for such home-made alternatives as egg shampoo.

BLUSH

What you need to know: The primary ingredient of most blushes is talc, which has been found to cause tumours in laboratory animals. EWG looked at 123 blushes and found that almost half contained possible human carcinogens butylated hydroxytoluene, polyethylene, polymethyl methacrylate, propylene, triethanolamine. Almost all of the products they looked at contained at least one paraben.

For your shopping cart: Kim Erickson, author of Drop-Dead Gorgeous: Protecting Yourself from the Hidden Dangers of Cosmetics, recommends colour based on natural colouring agents and bentonite or kaolin clay. The Safe Shopper's Bible advises that those looking for a natural product avoid brands containing D&C Red 33, FD&C Yellow 5, FD&C Yellow 6 and other artificial colours.

LIPSTICK

What you need to know: Here are the top ingredients of concern in lip makeups, as listed by the Environmental Working Group: propylparaben, tocopheryl acetate, methylparaben, tocopherol, myristyl lactate, butylparaben, petrolatum, butylated hydroxytoluene, polyethylene, stearylalmonium hectorite. The Shopper's Bible lists allergens commonly found in lipsticks, including castor oil, microcrystalline wax, pigments and Yellow 11. Further, it advises against applying products that contain such artificial colours as D&C Orange 5, D&C Orange 17, D&C Red 9, D&C Red 19,

FD&C Blue 1, FD&C Yellow 5 and FD&C Yellow 6. "The bottom line," the authors say, "there is probably no such thing as a safe coal tar colour."

For your shopping cart: Elizabeth Arden Crystal Clear Lip Gloss was the highest rated on the EWG safety survey. The Safe Shopper's Bible recommends Bonne Bell Lip Smackers. If you are looking for something that doesn't taste like bubble gum or strawberry, the authors recommend Aubrey Organics products and Dr. Hauschka lipsticks. The Guide to Less Toxic Products suggests vegetable or nut oil as a home-made alternatives to lip protector.

MOISTURIZERS, CREAM, LOTION

What you need to know: If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is. Take alpha hydroxy acids AHAs, for example, a common ingredient in face creams, especially those that promise to reduce wrinkles. As it turns out, AHAs have been proven to increase sun sensitivity and, consequently, contribute to signs of aging.

Lotions, creams and moisturizers are also likely to contain parabens. If there is a perfume or fragrance in the product, there may also be phthalates, a plasticizer chemical that is used to extend the life of a scent. Studies have connected phthalates to reproductive productive problems in male offspring.

In its study of 211 facial moisturizers, EWG found almost half contained possible carcinogens, including butylated hydroxytoluene, carrageenan, polymethyl methacrylate, selenium and triethanolamine. The same number also included harmful impurities that the EWG links to breast cancer. Creams and lotions can also contain penetration enhancers like propylene glycol and tetrasodium EDTA, which are designed to draw the formula deeper into the skin.

For your shopping cart: Avoid fragrances. Use sunscreens when using AHAs. Be aware that while synthetic moisturizers may make your skin feel soft when first applied, they can actually work to rob your skin of moisture and essential oils. If you believe less is more, try Terressentials www.terressentials.com moisture cream, which is 100 per cent organic, fragrance-free and consists of one ingredient: cold-pressed shea butter.

BUBBLE BATH

What you need to know: Where there are bubbles, chances are there are also foaming agents, dyes, detergents and preservatives. The EWG www.ewg.org lists 20 ingredients of concern in bath oils, salts and bubbles. Here is the Top 10: methylparaben, cocamide DEA, cocamidopropyl betaine, propylparaben, cocamide MEA, tocopheryl acetate, sodium laureth sulfate, PEG-7 glyceryl cocoate, diazolidinyl urea and propylene glycol.

In its review of 102 bath products, the environmental group found some that contained suspected carcinogens butylated hydroxytoluene, carrageenan and triethanolamine.

For your shopping cart: James Hahn and Diana Kaye of Terressentials, an organic body care firm, recommend using nothing but warm damp cloth on infants, unless they are especially icky. Presumably this might even work on adults. The Guide to Less Toxic Products recommends toys instead of bubbles for bathtime play. Aveeno Daily Moisturizing Bath Single Use Packets were among the top-rated choices on the EWG safety survey.

EYE MAKEUP

What you need to know: Talc is a common ingredient in powdered eye shadow. In Drop-Dead Gorgeous, Kim Erickson says that liquid products are no better because they are "typically packed with petrochemicals such as petrolatum and paraffin, along with the same FD&C colours prevalent in their powdered cousins." The products are

likely to contain at least one preservative. Mascara commonly contains petroleum distillates, shellac and phenylmercuric acetate. According to The Shopper's Bible, mascara is one of the cosmetics most likely to cause health problems, although primarily the ingredients are not to blame but rather the user who scratches an eyeball with the applicator.

For your shopping cart: Erickson recommends using natural products that contain cornstarch, kaolin, titanium oxide and iron oxides. If you use eyeliner, she suggests natural eye pencils made of plant waxes and iron oxides.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

What you need to know: Ingredient labels will not be mandatory in Canada until November 2006. Until that time, you may be able to find out what's in your beauty products by searching online at www.drugstore.com, a commercial site that details the ingredients of most of the items it sells. On the Environmental Working Group's website, you can create a custom report that details the potential health impacts associated with the ingredients in the products you use. They do not list every brand, but they did study more than 7,500 products.

Health Canada's Cosmetic Ingredient Hotlist was created to keep the cosmetic industry aware of new substances of concern. Although it was not really intended for consumers, you can find the list at www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hecs-sesc/cosmetics/hotlist_intro.htm.

Health Canada also answers frequently asked questions on its website at www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hecs-sesc/cosmetics/faq.htm

For more product suggestions as well as recipes for homemade alternatives, see The Guide to Less Toxic Products by the Environmental Health Association of Nova Scotia, www.lesstoxicguide.ca.

Sources: The Safe Shopper's Bible: A Consumer's Guide to Nontoxic Household Products, Cosmetics and Food by David Steinman and Samuel Epstein; Drop-Dead Gorgeous: Protecting Yourself from the Hidden Dangers of Cosmetics by Kim Erickson; Beauty to Die For: The Cosmetic Consequence by Judi Vance; Don't Go Shopping for Hair-Care Products Without Me by Paula Begoun; The Guide to Less Toxic Products, www.lesstoxicguide.ca.

Bather Beware: What you need to know before buying hair dye, baby wash, AHAs and organic products

CHILD-PROOF YOUR BABY BATH

Nothing is known for sure about the long-term effects of the products that we use, one on top of another, day in and day out. In the face of uncertainty, a growing voice of physicians and environmentalists are urging precaution.

The more you know about the products you choose to use on your baby, the better decisions you will make. Unfortunately for Canadians, finding this information is not as simple as reading the label on a package. Some companies list ingredients; others won't until legislated to do so in November 2006. In the meantime, you may be able to learn what's in your baby shampoo by searching www.drugstore.com, an online pharmacy and beauty supply site that lists what's in each item sold.

Here are just some of the ingredients you may wish to learn more about before using.

Phthalates: A chemical that makes nail polish stronger and fragrances last longer, phthalates are suspected estrogen mimics that have been linked to premature puberty in girls.

Parabens: A preservative in shampoos, bubble baths, diaper-rash ointment, baby wipes lotions. Parabens are also suspected hormone disrupters.

Petrolatum: Impurities in the manufacturing of petroleum jelly prompted petrolatum's inclusion as a probable human carcinogen on the European Union's Dangerous Substances Directive.

Talc: Talc has been linked to cancer in animals. Even without conclusive studies, doctors urge caution.

Until more is known about personal-care products, aim to use less: bathe your baby a little less frequently; daily washing can rob a baby's skin of essential oils. For more options see www.lesstoxicguide.ca

BECAUSE YOU'RE WORTH IT READ HAIR DYE LABELS, 'USE CAUTIOUSLY'

The cosmetic industry insists hair dyes are safe. They say dyes are the most thoroughly studied consumer products on the market today and say the amount of carcinogens in the formulas is too minute to matter.

Until recently, most studies about the hazards of hair dye were inconclusive. That is changing. A recent study in Public Health Reports found that the use of permanent hair dyes among men and women increases the risk of developing bladder cancer by up to 50 per cent compared to those who don't use hair dye.

"I personally would think twice about using permanent hair dyes and darker colours," said Dr. Michael Huncharek, who conducted a meta-analysis of data from several existing studies on hair dye and cancer. "I think that men and women should avoid them. I recommend that those who do should use them cautiously, especially if they smoke or have a family history of bladder cancer."

The Safe Shopper's Bible by David Steinman and Samuel Epstein offers the following tips on using hair dye:

1. Never use a product that lists a phenylenediamine compound on its label.
2. If you do use permanent and semi-permanent hair dyes, "do not leave on longer than necessary."
3. Flood scalp thoroughly with water after use.
4. Put off using hair dyes as long as possible. Some experts claim the age at which women start to use hair dyes is an important factor in determining risk.
5. Among the hair dyes they say have little or no risk: Igora Botanic, Logona Henna Black, Rainbow Research Henna, Salon Formula Sun-In. Among those that have "minimal risk" are several Clairol, L'Oreal and Revlon products in the blond to dark blond colour range.

AHAS EXPOSED A WRINKLE IN THE ANTI-WRINKLE CREAM

Alpha hydroxy acids, also known as fruit acids, have been used since the early 1990s. Marketers boasted they could smooth lines and wrinkles by stripping away the upper layer of skin, exposing new, fresh skin beneath.

Almost since the beginning, users have complained about AHAs, reporting redness, swelling, blistering, bleeding, rash, itching and skin discoloration. Removing the top layer of skin has been proven to increase sun sensitivity for up to a week after use of

the product has discontinued.

Although Health Canada has not issued warnings to consumers about the use of AHAs, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration cautions users to avoid sunlight as much as possible, wear hats with a large brim and apply sunscreen with an SPF of 15 or higher.

GOING GREEN PROCEED WITH CAUTION

Consumers are increasingly reaching for organic suds and lotions. Unfortunately, in the world of green there is an awful lot of grey. Many companies that espouse chemical-free living routinely use such synthetic preservatives as parabens, suspected hormone disrupters that have recently been linked to breast cancer. Some firms add "fragrances," a catch-all term that can include dozens upon dozens of chemicals.

Complicating matters is the fact manufacturers are not required to list product ingredients. Some do voluntarily, others won't until Health Canada makes it mandatory in November 2006.

The organic industry is divided over the use of chemical preservatives. Some argue that chemicals simply don't belong in "all natural" products, adding that you should not rub anything into your skin that you would not eat on a breakfast spoon.

Whatever your comfort level, you are advised to be skeptical when shopping for organic products. Ignore the front of the label. Find the ingredient list -- if there is one -- and start reading from the bottom, which is where chemical preservatives are listed.

SKIN DEEP

www.ewg.org

The Washington-based Environmental Working Group EWG studied more than 7,500 personal care products, comparing ingredients against government, industry and academic lists of known and suspected chemical health hazards. The results of the study can be found at www.ewg.org, where consumers can find out what chemicals are in the products that they use every day. "The overwhelming majority of ingredients in personal care products have not been assessed for safety," the group notes. "But of those that have been studied, some are listed by government agencies as known or probable carcinogens or reproductive toxins." The EWG rated products from 0 to 10, with 10 being of the greatest health concern.

GUIDE TO LESS TOXIC PRODUCTS

www.lesstoxicguide.ca/

The Environmental Health Association of Nova Scotia lists three objectives of this site: 1. To provide information about potential health risks of commonly used products. 2. To help identify less toxic alternatives for personal care, household cleaning, baby care and household pest control. 3. To provide information to help you evaluate products not in their guide in order to choose the safest ones for your needs. The exhaustive site includes a section on baby care and also features recipes for home-made alternatives. "In choosing the products we use on our bodies and in and around our homes WE are the ones in control," it says. "We can make informed choices for the sake of our own health and the health of our families."

EM COM

www.emcom.ca

This site from the McLaughlin Centre for Population Risk Assessment provides the latest information and studies on endocrine disruptors. The user-friendly site includes a primer on endocrines, details on endocrine disruption, key papers, research summaries and glossary.

HEALTH CANADA

www.hc-sc.gc.ca/english/iyh/products/cosmetics.html

This page features 11 points on minimizing the risks associated with using cosmetics -- "Always read package directions and warning labels" -- and includes an address for reporting adverse reactions to cosmetics and links to more information on Health Canada's Cosmetics Program, the Food and Drug Act and natural health products. You can also find Health Canada's hot list of banned or controlled ingredients at www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hecs-sesc/cosmetics/hotlist_changes.htm.

U.S. FOOD AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION

www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/cos-toc.html

This site includes FDA rules governing cosmetics, ingredient alerts and other information on everything from consumer complaints to alpha hydroxy acids to phthalates and hair dyes.

TERRESENTIALS

www.terressentials.com

Terressentials is a Maryland-based company that sells a wide range of organic personal-care products through this site. In addition to product information, Diana Kaye and James Hahn use the website to educate visitors about cosmetic ingredients, scientific studies and the need for government regulations to oversee strict organic standards. The site also includes The Healthy Person's Guide to Personal Care Ingredients, "a quick reference to help you make an educated decision about what ingredients you want to rub on your skin, put in your body and put in our waterways."

WOMEN'S ENVIRONMENTAL NETWORK

www.wen.org.uk/cosmetics/index.htm

Cosmetic safety is one area of concern for this London-based women's environmental group. The cosmetic section on this site includes links to fact sheets, details on chemical reform in the European Union and the 2002 report "Pretty Nasty," which found phthalates in 80 per cent of the 34 name-brand cosmetic products tested -- none of which listed phthalates as an ingredient on the label.

THE COSMETICS COP

www.cosmeticscop.com

Former makeup artist Paula Begoun is a syndicated beauty columnist and the author of Don't Go to the Cosmetics Counter Without Me, The Beauty Bible and Don't Go Shopping for Hair-Care Products Without Me. Begoun uses this site to sell her own line of cosmetics, but also features skin care facts, makeup tips and tricks, and an ingredient dictionary. "Combatting the endless parade of useless and bizarre information can be maddening," Begoun writes, "but it's my job and, thankfully, it has been far more rewarding than I ever expected."

THE CAMPAIGN FOR SAFE COSMETICS

www.safecosmetics.org

The cyberspace headquarters for a campaign that is successfully lobbying U.S. cosmetic firms to reformulate products without toxic chemicals. The site includes news stories on the campaign, a petition asking companies to phase out chemicals linked to cancer and the 2002 report Not Too Pretty: Phthalates, Beauty Products and the FDA. One section considers the products men use every day, including aftershave, deodorant and shampoo.

CANADIAN INSTITUTE OF CHILD HEALTH

www.cich.ca

The institute's site features links to resources on pregnancy, childbirth, child health and safe environments. The site includes downloadable fact sheets on childhood asthma, air pollutants, hormone disrupters, prenatal exposure and the neurodevelopmental effects of neurotoxicants.

CANCER PREVENTION COALITION

www.stopcancer.org

The stated goal of this website is to help Canadians learn about -- then take action on -- the primary prevention of cancer. The site is the work of the Kanata-based Saunders-Matthey Cancer Prevention Coalition and includes a section titled Cancer and the Environment, which details exposures as well as strategies for prevention, links and related reading.

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CLOSE WINDOW