

COMING CLEAN: LIVING GREEN

GET THESE INGREDIENTS OUT OF YOUR LIFE.

As the co-founder of a natural personal care products company, my job for the last 15 years has been to figure out a way to make products that are clean, simple, safe and luxurious so that they meet all the expectations of experience and performance that we've become accustomed to.

The idea was to make a lotion like a beautiful vinaigrette – as few high quality ingredients as possible (noting the difference, of course, between a vinaigrette from a fast-food restaurant and one lovingly made by Anne Somerville at Green's Restaurant.)

So we set out in 1995 with our product charter of no's: no artificial color (only colors from botanicals), no synthetic fragrance (only essential oils), no sodium lauryl/laureth sulfates or cocamide DEA (only greener surfactant alternatives), no propylene glycol, no diazolidinyl urea, no talc. If we couldn't find a safer alternative, we wouldn't make the product.

For example, it took us four years to come out with foaming products until we could find a substitute for sodium lauryl sulfate, that foamed and was safe. Before we became paraben free a few years ago, we thought parabens were the preservative of choice because it had a 25-year safe track record in food use.

The evolution of organic agriculture, local food systems, fair trade and green chemistry has informed our process. So has the increased incidence of cancer, reproductive issues and birth defects linked to chemical exposure. The 600 companies that have signed the Safe Cosmetics Pact are committed to responding to the unfolding questions about ingredient safety issues.

Much has changed over the last 12 years. There is an ever-increasing number of genuine green alternatives and an increasing number of companies that have jumped on the bandwagon of green marketing. We've become adept at reading food labels, but close scrutiny of the ingredients used in our personal care products is lagging and more problematic for several reasons.

We don't know what to look for and the \$50 billion U.S. cosmetic industry is self-regulating and not that interested in dealing with "the precautionary principle" at this point. Which means, let the buyer beware. The EU has banned over 1,100 of these chemicals, compared to the U.S. elimination of 10. According to the Campaign for Safe Cosmetics, the ingredients in personal care products in the U.S. number over 10,000, of which 11 percent have been assessed for health and safety by the industry's self-policing panel.

To get you up to speed, I'd like to propose an experiment. For one day, please write down every personal care product that you use from the time you wake up to the time you go to bed. Please count your toothpaste, whitening rinse, saline solution for your contact lenses, hand sanitizer – everything! Each of us can expect to absorb 4 lbs., 6 oz of chemicals through our skin, inhaled or ingested, each year.

On average, women use 15 makeup/skincare products and 10 other personal care products daily – a combo that can easily contain over 175 chemicals. The problem is that the FDA does not require personal care and cosmetic companies to test their products for safety.

Some of these chemicals are linked to cancer, birth defects, learning disabilities and other health issues. Each chemical's safety is evaluated in parts per million. But none of us use just one product. Small amounts of toxic chemicals add up and can accumulate in our bodies, and we have to start from wherever we are to lighten our chemical load as we are practicing lightening our environmental footprint. Old habits die hard and we have to start by being ever more conscious in our patterns and purchases.

So here's the deal: Read labels, use the environmental working group's database (www.skindeep.com)

and here's the avoid like the plague list for your reference.

1 Formaldehyde, toluene, dibutyl pthalates – Found mostly in nail polishes, these three toxins are highly suspected as carcinogens. Use nail polish that is formulated without these three.

2 Fragrance: This is an umbrella for a group of synthetic chemicals which may contain pthalates, which are probable human reproductive or developmental toxins and endocrine disruptors.

3 Diazolidinyl urea: Used as a preservative – toxic formaldehyde donor.

4 Parabens: Methyl, butyl, propyl, ethyl – used as a preservative and regarded as safe for 25 years. Recent evidence shows that parabens display estrogenic activity and have the possibility of

mimicking your body's own hormones.

5 Sodium lauryl/laureth sulfates, cocamide DEA: Harsh fast foamers that can be highly irritating – still found in many bath products, shampoos, shower gels and toothpaste.

6 FD&C colorants: There's no reason for us to ingest or lather or apply these chemicals to our bodies. They add to our possible toxic load without an appreciable upside. Look for food or botanical based colorants.

7 Talc: Has been linked to increased incidence of ovarian cancer – no reason to go there – corn and other starch based powders work fine.

For more information: Campaign for Safe Cosmetics (www.safecosmetics.org); Environmental Working Group (www.ewg.org).

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