

# How Toxic Are *Your* Personal Care Products?

By Kristen De Paula



Are skin care and make-up products made in the USA safe? Not necessarily.

Did you know that the US has not passed a federal law regulating the \$60 billion cosmetic industry since 1938? While the European Union has banned nearly 1,400 ingredients from cosmetics, the United States has banned a mere 11.

In the U.S. today, it is completely legal for companies to use toxic ingredients that are known to cause cancer or other health problems in the products that we put on our (and our family's) skin daily. Most cosmetic companies prefer to think of our health in a very short-term context, working to avoid acute reactions such as a rash or irritated eyes, while little to no attention is paid to our long-term health. That, we have to do ourselves.

Research has revealed that exposure to toxic chemicals in our daily lives plays a role in the increase of many serious illnesses and health issues in society today. It isn't surprising that childhood cancers, autism, ADHD, asthma, and allergies are on the rise in the U.S. and learning disabilities now affect more than 1 in 6 children. Recent data showed more than 200 synthetic chemicals in the umbilical cord blood of newborn babies, and difficulty in conceiving and maintaining a pregnancy affected 40% more women in 2002 than in 1982.

During a recent study, 16 toxic chemicals (phthalates, triclosan, parabens, and musks) were found in the bodies of teenage girls; 13 of which are hormone altering. Girls today are entering puberty at an earlier age than a generation ago due to the exposure of endocrine disruptors. Early puberty puts girls at a higher risk for breast cancer later in life. 1 in 8 women will be diagnosed with breast cancer while only 10% of these women carry the gene for the disease.

With all of these health concerns on the rise, it becomes increasingly important that we educate ourselves as to what we are using. Thankfully, by making just a few changes, you can drastically reduce your exposure to toxic chemicals.

Toxic chemicals enter our bodies through airways when inhaling powders or through our skin, lips, and nails when we apply products. Small doses of ingredients can have a big effect when absorbed through the skin.

For example, .035 parts per billion (ppb) is the amount absorbed from a NuvaRing, and will stop conception.

2.1 ppb is absorbed in Albuterol and will stop an asthma attack.

To give some perspective, 1 ppb is equal to a teaspoon of red food coloring in an Olympic sized swimming pool!

Tiny amounts can have a huge impact particularly when our bodies are undergoing certain periods of development (puberty, pregnancy, in the womb, infancy). During these periods, we are more susceptible to hormone disruption that could lead to big health issues later in life.

Now think of how many products you use (and how much) daily.

Unfortunately, even knowing which ingredients to avoid in a personal care product can be tricky due to the lack of transparency on product labels. The FDA does not have the power to ask cosmetic companies for safety data or issue recalls of cosmetics found to be unsafe and they do not require cosmetic ingredients or products to be approved before they go on the market.

One of the most common ingredients to be aware of is fragrance. Companies don't have to disclose what it is because it is considered a trade secret (think "Grandma's recipe"). Usually, it is a synthetic concoction that includes phthalates and synthetic musks which we know are hormone disruptors. Some chemicals are not intentionally added to products but are the results of chemical reactions happening inside the bottle of a product. Companies usually know that these toxins will be in the finished product, but do not list them on the ingredient labels as they are not required to do so.

Another sign to be wary of are products listed as "organic" or "natural."

What do the terms "organic", "natural", "green", and "safe" mean when it comes to cosmetics? Legally - nothing. Products certified as "organic" can contain as little as 10% organic ingredients depending on the certifier.

For example, lead is "natural." Not at all safe, but "natural."

Petrolatum is "naturally" derived from gasoline and is very common in baby lotions. Again, not safe, but "natural" nonetheless.

"Safe" is not a standardized term. Some cosmetic companies consider carcinogens safe to use in products... because they are "legal".

Many times when companies buy bulk ingredients, they are often getting an already preserved raw ingredient (i.e. Aloe vera gel with phenoxyethanol). The end product does not have to list these preservatives, so a "preservative free" or "paraben free" product may contain these chemicals after all.

The current lack of regulation we have for personal care products in our country makes buying "safe" products difficult and time consuming, but the Environmental Working Group has an amazing resource for consumers called the Skin Deep Data Base. ([www.ewg.org/skindeep](http://www.ewg.org/skindeep)) They also have a free app which allows you to simply scan the bar code of a product to see its rating. This really comes in handy while shopping with toddlers!

There are also some companies that are fighting the good fight and are committed to producing safe and effective personal care products. I have found many excellent products that outperform their toxic counterparts! You do not have to sacrifice performance for safety!

For a comprehensive list of ingredients to avoid at all costs, further information on safe and effective products, and/or for a free skin consultation, please feel free to contact me at [kristendepaula@gmail.com](mailto:kristendepaula@gmail.com).

*Kristen De Paula is first and foremost a mother of a two year old little girl and a 4 year old little boy. She is also a licensed esthetician and very passionate about regulation reform for personal care products in this country. She recently began working for a new company that is committed to getting safe and affordable products into the hands of everyone by banning over 1500 toxic ingredients and providing total transparency on their labels.*

*She currently teaches Babywearing Ballet at Bini Birth in Sherman Oaks (her original passion) and gives monthly lectures on product safety there.*

*Please contact her at [kristendepaula@gmail.com](mailto:kristendepaula@gmail.com) with any ingredient or skin concern. And please talk about this issue. The more informed everyone is, the easier it will be to make safer choices.*