

## How to Avoid Toxic Chemicals in Cosmetics

In the previous few articles, we focused on the harmful chemicals in product containers and products and about, how they affect human health through dermal absorption. There are many regulatory authorities keeping a check on what chemicals are being used in cosmetics. However, laws and regulations can't always protect consumers from harmful chemicals completely. Therefore, the focus of this article will be mainly on how to identify potentially harmful or toxic chemicals in cosmetics and how to avoid them.

The first line of defense is a good offense! You should be an educated consumer, read labels and know which chemicals are harmful for you. The few of the most common harmful ones are Parabens used as preservatives, lead used in SOME lipsticks, formaldehyde in SOME shampoos and mercury used in imported creams and most mascaras. These are just some high-level carcinogens and neurotoxins. A few more products are still under study to determine the extent of their harmful content and the quantities at which they are dangerous. Nevertheless, their link with diseases such as cancer is enough to avoid them. You can read the previous post to know more details about toxic chemicals present in your cosmetics.

Before buying the products, you must read the ingredients. Most of the chemicals are labeled by their names only so it is quite easy to identify them. For example, Parabens are preservatives and usually in the form of methylparaben, butylparaben or propylparaben. If you find these chemicals in the ingredients, you know that you need to find an alternative. The quantity of the chemical can be estimated by its position in the ingredients. The farther down the list a chemical is placed, the lesser of its quantity is used. If you are unsure about any chemical used, do your research on the internet or ask your dermatologist about its effects. It is better to know a little before buying, than to risk your health with beauty products.

The process of identifying chemicals in ingredients is made easy by platforms such as The Environmental Working Group's Skin Deep online database, The Compact for Safe Cosmetics' FAQ titled "What Should I Buy?" and iPhone app called "Think Dirty".<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, you can start using natural products and support their growth in the market. There are many companies out there using just natural compounds in their products. They are priced slightly higher, but in the long term, they are worth your money's value. Avoiding or banning products with toxic chemicals will force all companies to phase out the harmful products too. Right now, there is not enough awareness among consumers to pressure the cosmetic companies to pursue the path of more expensive natural components.

There is only so much that the regulating authorities can do. Consumers will have to take action themselves and promote safer products. They need to do research, learn more about toxic chemicals and educate their fellow beings too.

For more information on toxic chemicals used in consumer products including cosmetics and beauty products, read our previous blog posts. The next post will explain the Food and Drug Administration (FDA)'s role in awareness of toxic chemicals and if they really can regulate all cosmetics through its legislations.

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<sup>1</sup> Beauty and Its Beastly Secrets: The Toxic Truth about Cosmetics. Take Part. <http://www.takepart.com/article/2013/10/29/toxic-chemicals-in-cosmetics>. Accessed 8 November 2013.