

What Are The Toxic Chemicals In Cosmetics And Skin Care Products?

We have discussed in detail the harmful chemicals used in beauty product containers and their effect on human health. But what about the beauty products themselves? Are there any toxic chemicals present in cosmetics and skin care products, which we religiously use to enhance our appearance? If yes, then how do we know, which products are safe to use and which are not? Read further to learn more about potentially toxic chemicals in your beauty products.

There is a wide variety of chemicals used in cosmetics and skin care products that are now found to do more harm to human health than good. Some of these chemicals are banned by regulating authorities, but loopholes in laws and inconclusive evidence of the toxicity of these chemicals allow some companies to keep on producing potentially harmful products.

Previously, most of the cosmetic products were tested on animals to determine relative toxicity level, but with time, a more animal friendly approach has been adopted by many organizations. These organizations now developed alternative methods to test their products, which includes skin corrosion, genotoxicity, phototoxicity, percutaneous penetration and the test for skin irritancy on Episkin.¹ Episkin is cultured human skin that is grown in a laboratory from cells obtained from the top layer of pieces of actual human skin. Episkin can be manipulated and adapted to resemble different types of skin – old to young. Researches and experiments are being done continually to find more ways to test products.

Moving on to the toxic chemicals still present or banned in many cosmetics and skin creams. Here is a list to guide you through:

- . Lead – found in lipsticks, whitening toothpastes, hair dyes. Lead can cause neurotoxicity, reproductive problems and gastrointestinal issues.

¹ On Animal Testing. L'Oreal. <http://answers.loreal.com/animaltesting/en/what-actual-alternative-methods-to-testing-have-been-developed-by-loreal/>. Accessed 8 November 2013.

- . Parabens – act as a preservative. Found in almost all lotions, creams, masks, and face washes. Parabens can cause developmental toxicity, reproductive toxicity, breast cancer because studies have shown that parabens have estrogen-like properties and can be carcinogenic.
- . Mercury – found in mascaras. Mercury can cause skin irritation and neurological damage.
- . Talc – found in soaps, eye shadows, powders, blushes. Several studies in women have looked at the possible link between talcum powder and cancer of the ovary. Findings are mixed but in some cases there has been enough linkage between talc and ovarian cancer.
- . Toluene – found in nail polishes. Toluene is known to be carcinogenic and can cause liver and kidney damage.
- . Perfumes and dyes – found in all artificially scented and colored products. Can cause allergic reactions and skin irritation.
- . Formaldehyde – used in hair dyes, nail polishes, shampoos. Formaldehyde can cause cancer cell formation, skin irritation and nausea.

These are few of the widely known toxic chemicals.

Although authorities are trying to phase out some cosmetics made with the chemicals listed above but there are still being widely used throughout the world. The evidence of most diseases from many of these chemicals is certainly not conclusive. Therefore, consumers continue to use them despite awareness and suggestive studies. However, the level of increased awareness is causing rifts and the companies are being forced to opt for healthier alternatives.

Toxic Substances Control Act is a law passed in the United States of America to regulate the production, use and disposal of chemicals. Other agencies like Food and Drug Administration (FDA) work alongside and with such acts to try to form a culture of using safe chemicals in products and product containers alike. Due to the wide variety of chemicals and the research still at an initial level, these agencies and legislation can do only so much to protect the

consumers. That's why, as consumers, we should also check and keep an eye out for toxic chemicals in the beauty products that we use. The next article will help explain how to avoid such chemicals while buying the products.