

BEAUTYCOUNTER

COUNTER INTELLIGENCE

HEALTH AND COSMETIC SAFETY

CHEMICAL INGREDIENTS: THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE UGLY

Are all chemicals bad?

Not all chemicals are bad for us. Our body is made up of chemicals, and so is everything else, including food and water. Toxic chemicals, however, are bad for us. “Toxic” means those chemicals that can harm cells or organs, cause neurological damage, and/or alter important biological systems. Toxic chemicals can enter our bodies in different ways. In the case of cosmetics, toxic chemicals can enter our bodies through our skin, lips and nails when we apply products, and through our airways when we inhale particles from powders and sprays.

Are skincare and makeup products made and sold in the U.S. & Canada safe?

Not necessarily. Many cosmetic companies think of health and safety in a short-term context, working to avoid acute reactions, such as a rash or irritated eyes. Very few companies, however, are paying attention to our long-term health. Right now in the U.S., it is completely legal for companies to use toxic chemicals in the products that we put on our bodies every day – even if the ingredients are linked to cancer or other health problems. Of course, there are several companies that strive to make safer products, and we consider them allies.

Do U.S. & Canadian governments make sure products are safe?

No. The U.S. law that governs the \$62 billion cosmetics industry was passed in 1938 and does not provide the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) with the power to ask cosmetic companies for safety data or issue recalls of cosmetics found to be unsafe. In the U.S., 30 ingredients are restricted or banned from cosmetics. The European Union (EU) bans close to 1,400 ingredients from cosmetics. The federal Canadian government currently prohibits less than 600 substances for use in cosmetics through Health Canada. The Office of the General Auditor in Canada announced in the spring of 2016 that Health Canada, “...does not regularly test cosmetic products to verify the accuracy of product labels or to check for the presence of prohibited substances, microbial contaminants, and heavy metals.”

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Are you saying that my lipstick or body lotion may give me cancer?

It isn't that simple. The chemicals present in any one cosmetic are unlikely to cause serious harm. But none of us use just one product. Think about how many products you use in a single day, in a year, and over a lifetime. Chemicals can accumulate in our bodies and prove harmful over time. In addition, exposure to some chemicals can have bigger impacts during certain periods of development, like in utero or during infancy or puberty, than exposure at other times in life. We advocate for reducing exposure to toxic chemicals across the board, whenever possible to protect our health.

I don't wear very much makeup, so I'm probably safe, right?

This issue extends beyond makeup to all of the products we use on our bodies every day: shampoo, lotion, aftershave, cologne, even baby shampoo.

Is it possible for cosmetics to work without toxic ingredients?

Yes. There are many safer ingredients available today that work just as well as their commonly used, toxic counterparts.

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BEAUTYCOUNTER: MOVING THE BEAUTY INDUSTRY FORWARD

How does Beautycounter choose ingredients?

In order to ensure that every Beautycounter product meets our high performance standard without compromising health, we have established a health-protective Ingredient Selection Process. These are the five principles we uphold with the selection of every single ingredient:

1. Ban Intentionally
2. Screen Rigorously
3. Learn Constantly
4. Source Responsibly
5. Share Transparently

There are major data gaps on most cosmetic ingredients. This is because it is perfectly legal for chemical companies to bring a chemical to market with no information on how it might impact health or the environment. We do not assume that the absence of data means a chemical is safe. It simply means we don't know about the potential health impacts. So, we review emerging data regularly and will even commission our own studies when we are not able to turn up enough information.

Beautycounter supports research initiatives to learn more about ingredient safety, and we work with green chemists to find new, safer ingredients and solutions. We consult with scientists and industry leaders working to reduce exposure to toxic chemicals and to develop safer, green chemicals from the start.

What do natural, organic, green and safe mean when it comes to cosmetics?

Legally? Not much. Due to major loopholes in federal law, cosmetics can be labeled “natural,” “sustainable,” and nearly any other word that comes to mind without containing ingredients that accurately meet those descriptions. However, the National Organic Program (NOP) sets the U.S. federal standards for the management and enforcement of all USDA-certified organic products, so that is a meaningful claim. Beautycounter selects dozens of natural, plant-derived and certified organic ingredients. We look forward to increasing our USDA-certified organic ingredients over time, always with safety, performance and affordability in mind.

“Safe” is not a standardized term, either. The Food and Drug Administration’s Office of Cosmetics and Colors (the agency that is in charge of regulating all cosmetics) does not define safety. Some cosmetic companies consider known carcinogens “safe” to use in products simply because they are used in small amounts and it is not illegal to include them.

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Why does Beautycounter favor the word “safer” over “safe?”

We describe our products as “safer” rather than “safe” because we believe it is a more accurate, honest term. Strictly speaking, one cannot prove something is safe—you can conduct a study to determine if something causes harm but not to determine safety. And many ingredients are understudied, so while there might be no “red flags” it doesn’t mean that we know that there is no potential hazard or risk.

At Beautycounter, we conduct hazard assessments on every single ingredient using a stringent, health-protective process for each review. Our company mission is to get the safest products into the hands of everyone, whether it be directly through our products or by working with our legislators to pass and enforce more health-protective laws for the cosmetic and personal care industry.

Why does Beautycounter talk about transparency and ingredient disclosure?

We believe you have the right to know what goes into our products. We disclose all of our ingredients and work to make our labels easy to read.

There are three main obstacles to transparency for most other beauty and skin care products on the market:

- 1 “Fragrance” is considered a trade secret, so companies don’t have to disclose what it is. Usually, it is a synthetic concoction that includes phthalates and synthetic musks, which are hormone disruptors, as well as chemicals that are allergens and neurotoxins.
- 2 Some chemicals are not intentionally added to products but are the result of chemical reactions happening inside the bottle of product (such as formaldehyde in shampoo) or during manufacturing (such as 1,4 dioxane in moisturizers or heavy metals in color cosmetics).
- 3 When manufacturing companies buy bulk ingredients from ingredient suppliers (aloe vera gel or grapefruit seed extract), they are often getting an already-preserved raw ingredient (aloe vera gel with added phenoxyethanol, or grapefruit seed extract with added methylparaben). But the end product does not have to list these preservatives, so a product marketed as “preservative-free” or “paraben-free” may contain those chemicals after all.

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What are phthalates and parabens?

Phthalates and most parabens are chemicals that are known endocrine (hormone) disruptors, meaning they can alter important hormonal mechanisms in our bodies.

Phthalates (pronounced THAL-lates) are plasticizers – they make plastic more pliable (think shower curtains) and are a huge component of PVC plastic, which is one of the more toxic plastics. In cosmetics, phthalates are used to make fragrances stick to skin, styling products malleable, and nail polish bend and stick to the curve of your nail.

They are thought to block signaling pathways for hormones like testosterone and have been linked to birth defects. There are many kinds of phthalates (the ones used in cosmetics are abbreviated as DBP and DEHP), but since they don't often appear on ingredient labels, they can be tricky to avoid. This is one of the big reasons that Beautycounter advocates for full disclosure of all ingredients.

Parabens are a class of preservatives used in many skincare and makeup products to prevent the growth of bacteria and mold. Methylparaben, isobutylparaben, propylparaben are the most common in personal care products and are concerning as they mimic estrogen and may play a role in triggering cancer and other adverse health effects.

It is important to try to avoid ingredients like these and others that are on our [Never List](#), but it is just as important to know the ingredients companies use to replace them.

Our *Health and Cosmetic Safety* FAQ is growing all the time. If you would like to know more about a particular issue, please feel free to contact us at info@beautycounter.com.