

Ingredients Watch List

Even in familiar, trusted brands, we simply don't know what we're really using. The simplest of products can contain an enormous number of chemicals. These chemicals aren't just used in cosmetics, either—they have double lives. My former “gentle” eye makeup remover contains chemicals also found in antifreeze, pesticide, toilet bowl cleaner, furniture stripper, tire cleaner, and gas treatments.

The more you know about what you're buying, the less pretty you feel. The problem isn't chemicals—after all, you could say we're made of chemicals—but the problem is with synthetic chemicals that may be affecting us in ways we don't yet understand.

Below is a partial list of ingredients you'll want to watch for on labels. For more information, and a detailed explanation of each ingredient, please see *Beauty Secrets of The Bible*.

1. Parabens

A preservative used in almost all beauty products, parabens have been linked to breast cancer. It is still unclear whether parabens simply accumulate in breast cancer tumors, or actually incite tumor growth. Check back on my website, www.gingergarrett.com for updates as information becomes available.

2. DEA

The National Toxicology Program found an association between topical applications of the cosmetic ingredient DEA (and DEA-related ingredients) and cancer in laboratory animals. DEA is diethanolamine. A closely related chemical is TEA, or triethanolamine.

3. Phthalates

A Harvard study has linked phthalates with abnormalities in sperm and adult male infertility. You may have seen labels on children's toys promising to be “phthalate free.” The scare was significant enough to prompt manufacturers to get rid of any phthalates in toys that could be chewed on or handled by babies. However, the cosmetic industry continues to put them in products that adults, including women of child-bearing age, use daily, and the CDC has reported elevated levels of phthalates excreted in the urine of women of child-bearing age. Phthalates include dibutylphthalate (DBP), dimethylphthalate (DMP), and diethyl phthalate (DEP). Because these can be used in fragrance, and fragrances don't have to list the individual components, this ingredient is not always easy to detect on a cosmetic label.

4. Sodium lauryl sulfate

This is a detergent used in shampoos and soaps. It can be harsh and can cause irritated skin and a flaking or irritated scalp. While not toxic, I don't like to see this as a main ingredient. If it is the first or second ingredient in a product, look for a milder alternative.

5. Petroleum

Petroleum and petroleum products (mineral oil, petrolatum, petroleum) are used in many cosmetic preparations, and there is a lingering debate over whether petroleum products are completely safe or effective. Advocates for banning petroleum say it does not allow skin cell turnover and increases premature aging, and that potential contaminants from the manufacturing process can cause a health risk.

6. Slaughterhouse Waste

Ingredients manufactured from slaughterhouse-waste may include tallow, oleic acid, glycerin, collagen, keratin and gelatin.

There are currently twenty-five facilities in the United States that convert slaughterhouse waste into cosmetics raw materials. Your best bet is to look for labels that say “No Animal By-Products,” or “100 percent vegan.”