

Top Chemical Offenders to Avoid

1. Sodium Lauryl Sulfate (SLS) and Sodium Laureth Sulfate (SLES)

Where's it's found: It's in various bathroom and personal care items in addition to floor cleaner, engine degreaser and car wash detergent. It is a surfactant used to break down surface tension of water which causes the product to foam up. It is found in almost every brand of toothpaste on the market.

The Risks: This is the most toxic substance on this list. It's a mutagen, meaning it is capable of changing genetic information found in cells. It also causes irritations skin tissue, causes eye damage, depression, diarrhea, corrodes hair follicles and impairs hair growth. When combined with other chemicals containing nitrogen, they can form nitrosamines, a deadly class of carcinogens. It also leaves a residue in the heart, liver, lungs and brain just from skin contact. It damages the immune system and denatures proteins. (Journal of the American College of Toxicology; Vol. 2, No. 7, 1983)

2. Triclosan

Where's it's found: It is a synthetic antibacterial ingredient used in soaps and disinfectant gels that has been compared to Agent Orange. It is widely used in antibacterial cleansers, toothpaste, and household products.

The Risks: The EPA registers it as a pesticide, highly toxic to any living organism. It is also classified as a chlorophenol. In other words, it is in a cancer-causing chemical class. It disrupts hormones, can affect sexual function and fertility, and may foster birth defects. It has been linked to paralysis, suppression of the immune system, brain hemorrhages, and heart problems.

3. Diethanolamine (DEA), MEA (Monoethanolamine), TEA (Triethanolamine)

Where's it's found: It's a lathering agent in soaps, detergents and surfactants. It is found in more than 600 home and personal care products and since none of these products require warning labels it's up to the consumer to inspect labels for the following: cocamide DEA, DEA lauryl sulfate, lauramide DEA, linoleamide DEA, oleamide DEA or TEA (triethanolamine).

The Risks: It has been linked to cancers of the liver, kidneys, stomach and esophagus. a 2006 study from UNC found miscarriage and fetal brain defects due to DEA.

4. Propylene Glycol

Where's it's found: Antifreeze, hydraulic fluid, paints, shampoo, deodorant, toothpaste, lotion, cosmetics. Stick deodorant had a higher concentration of PG than is allowed for most industrial uses. It is also called propanediol and it is a humectant, meaning a substance that retains moisture. It keeps pet foods chewy, skin soft and baby wipes wet.

The Risks: It causes reactions and is a skin irritant. It is harmful when inhaled, ingested or absorbed by the skin. It can cause skin irritations, eye irritations, gastrointestinal disturbances, nausea, headaches, vomiting and nervous system depression. Direct contact can cause brain, liver and kidney abnormalities. Newborns and the elderly are at special risk for propylene glycol toxicity according to a 2007 study

done by the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry. The EPA requires workers to wear protective gear when using this substance but the FDA says we can put it in our bodies.

5. Phthalates and Parabens

Where it's found: Banned by the European Union in 2003, phthalates and parabens are a group of chemicals commonly used as preservatives in cosmetics and pharmaceuticals. They keep hairsprays sticky and bacteria and fungus out of things like nail polish and perfume.

The Risks: Both have demonstrated to be carcinogenic and particularly linked to breast cancer.

6. FD&C Color Pigments

Where it's found: Food, drinks, drugs and cosmetics.

The Risks: Most FD&C color pigments are made from coal tar and studies show that almost all of them are carcinogenic. Many of these pigments cause skin sensitivity and irritation, or even oxygen depletion in the blood. FD&C Red #4 is no longer available for use in foods because of a known threat to the adrenal glands and urinary bladder.

7. Fragrance

Where it's found: "Fragrance" is a euphemism for nearly 4,000 different ingredients. They are found in most shampoos, deodorants, sunscreens, skincare and body care products.

The Risks: Most "fragrances" are synthetic and are either cancer-causing or otherwise toxic. Exposure to fragrances has been shown to affect the central nervous system.

8. Imidazolidinyl Urea and DMDM Hydantoin

Where it's found: They are used in skin, body and hair products, antiperspirants, and nail polish.

The Risks: These are formaldehyde donors, which means that they are derivatives of the formaldehyde, which is what scientists and morticians use to preserve corpses and body parts. These chemicals are linked to allergies, chest pain, chronic fatigue, depression, dizziness, ear infections, headaches, joint pain, loss of sleep, and can trigger asthma. They can weaken the immune system, and—surprise surprise—cause cancer.

9. PEG (Polyethylene Glycol)

Where it's found: PEGs are most commonly used in spray-on oven cleaners and in many hair and skin products. PEG's main functions are to dissolve oil and grease.

The Risks: On the body, they take the protective oils off the skin and hair, making them more vulnerable to other toxins.

10. Mineral Oil

Where it's found: It is found in many hair care products, lip balms, soaps, cosmetics and skin care products. Note that baby oil is 100% mineral oil—and 100% bad for your baby's sensitive skin.

The Risks: Petrolatum is a petrochemical that contains two well-known carcinogens: Benzo-A-Pyrene and Benzo-B-Fluroanthene. As you might imagine from a petroleum derivative, petrolatum prevents the skin from breathing, absorbing and excreting. It slows the skin's natural cell development, causing premature aging. The European Union considers it a carcinogen and restricts its use in cosmetics.

11. Talc

Where's it's found: Body and baby powders, cosmetics and condoms. It is used as a dry lubricant to make the skin feel slippery.

The Risks: Chemically it is similar to asbestos, a cancer causing substance. It's been long known as harmful to skin and was linked the lesions as early as 1930. In 1993 the National Toxicology Program linked talc to tumors in animals. The American Journal of Epidemiology found that women who use talcum powder in the genital areas had an increased ovarian cancer risk of 60% and women who used feminine deodorant sprays had a 90% increased risk. (U.S. News & World Report, March 17, 1997 v122 n10 p77)

12. Isopropyl Alcohol

Where's it's found: Mouthwash, hair color rinse, body rubs, and lotions.

The Risks: Mouthwashes with 25% or higher amount of alcohol have been implicated in mouth, tongue and throat cancers. It is a solvent, making tissues more vulnerable to carcinogens. In a 2009 issue of Dental Journal of Australia, it was said that "alcohol-containing mouthwashes contribute to the increased risk of development of oral cancer." Alcohol also destroys intestinal flora, causes headaches, dizziness, depression, nausea, vomiting and even coma.

13. Aluminum

Where's it's found: It's in processed foods, antiperspirants, antacids, cosmetics, paper products, beverage cans, cooking foil and cookware.

The Risks: It is the third most common element in the environment and is a toxin in the body. The World Health Organization suspects a link between Alzheimer's and aluminum toxicity, based on autopsies of disease patients. It also contributes to decreased renal function, neurodegenerative effects and free radical damage.

14. Mercury

Where's it's found: It's also known as liquid silver and is found in sunscreen, lotion, lip gloss, mascara, baby shampoo and more.

The Risks: It's known to cause cancer and causes developmental and reproductive issues.

15. Ethanol

Where's it's found: Also known as ethyl hydroxide, it is found in moisturizers, body mists, hairsprays, perfumes, self-tanners and more.

The Risks: It is known to cause cancer, developmental and reproductive damage.

16. Lead

Where's it's found: Also known as acetic acid, lead salt and lead diacetate. It's found in shampoos, conditioners, hair color products, gel, lotion, scalp treatments and more.

The Risks: It is known to cause cancer and organ and system failure.

