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Minimize Toxicity: Essential #5

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What Is Lurking in Your Personal Care Products?

Unfortunately, microbeads are only one toxin to look out for in your cosmetics and personal care products. The average US woman uses 12 personal care products and/or cosmetics a day, containing 168 different chemicals, according to the Environmental Working Group (EWG).

While most men use fewer products, they're still exposed to about 85 such chemicals daily, while teens, who use an average of 17 personal care products a day, are exposed to even more.

Clearly, such chemical exposures are not insignificant, especially when they occur virtually daily for a lifetime. When EWG tested teens to find out which chemicals in personal care products were found in their bodies, 16 different hormone-altering chemicals, including parabens and phthalates, were detected.

Further, in a study of more than 31,000 US women, researchers examined blood and urine levels of 111 mostly man-made chemicals commonly found in plastics, personal care products, and household items, as well as which may contaminate air, water, and soil.

Women with higher levels of the chemicals in their bodies were found to experience menopause two to four years earlier than women with lower levels. Fifteen chemicals in particular (including nine PCBs, three pesticides, two phthalates, and a furan) were significantly associated with early menopause, which suggests an early decline in ovarian function. Some of the most hazardous chemicals found in *many* personal care products and cosmetics include:

- **Paraben**, a chemical found in deodorants and other cosmetics that has been shown to mimic the action of the female hormone estrogen, which can drive the growth of human breast tumors. A study published in 2012 suggested that parabens from antiperspirants and other cosmetics indeed appear to increase your risk of breast cancer. The research looked at where breast tumors were appearing and determined that higher concentrations of parabens were found in the upper quadrants of the breast and axillary area, where antiperspirants are usually applied.
- **Sodium lauryl sulfate**, a surfactant, detergent and emulsifier used in thousands of cosmetic products, as well as in industrial cleaners. It's present in nearly all shampoos, scalp treatments, hair color and bleaching agents, toothpastes, body washes and cleansers, make-up foundations, liquid hand soaps, laundry detergents, and bath oils/bath salts. The real problem with SLES/SLS is that the manufacturing

process (ethoxylation) results in SLES/SLS being contaminated with 1,4 dioxane, a carcinogenic byproduct.

- **Phthalates** are plasticizing ingredients that have been linked to birth defects in the reproductive system of boys and lower sperm-motility in adult men, among other problems. Be aware that phthalates are often hidden on shampoo labels under the generic term “fragrance.”
- **Methylisothiazolinone (MIT)**, a chemical used in shampoo to prevent bacteria from developing, which may have detrimental effects on your nervous system.
- **Toluene**, made from petroleum or coal tar, and found in most synthetic fragrances and nail polish. Chronic exposure linked to anemia, lowered blood cell count, liver or kidney damage, and may affect a developing fetus.

How to Find Safer Personal Care Products

The Environmental Working Group has a great database to help you find personal care products that are free of potentially dangerous chemicals.¹² Products bearing the USDA 100% Organic seal are among your safest bets if you want to avoid potentially toxic ingredients. Be aware that products boasting "all-natural" labels can still contain harmful chemicals, so be sure to check the full list of ingredients. Better yet, simplify your routine and make your own products. A slew of lotions, potions, and hair treatments can be eliminated with a jar of coconut oil, for example, to which you can add a high-quality essential oil, if you like, for scent.

It's important to remember that your skin is your largest and most permeable organ. Just about anything you put on your skin will end up in your bloodstream and distributed throughout your body. Once these chemicals find their way into your body, they tend to accumulate over time because you typically lack the necessary enzymes to break them down. This is why I'm so fond of saying "don't put anything on your body that you wouldn't eat if you had to." What you'll notice if you browse through the ingredients in any of my personal line of natural skin care products is just that – ingredients you'll know and recognize, like organic coconut oil, orange oil or rosemary extract.

If you're worried about giving up your exfoliating microbeads, there are many more natural options that will leave your skin glowing. Dry skin brushing, for instance, removes dead dry skin, improving appearance, clearing your clogged pores, and allowing your skin to "breathe." You can also make a homemade exfoliant simply by combining a natural abrasive, such as salt, sugar, or coffee grounds, with a carrier oil such as coconut oil.

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