

Ingredients to Avoid

Benzalkonium chloride

A disinfectant used as a preservative and surfactant associated with severe skin, eye, and respiratory irritation and allergies. Found in: sunscreens, moisturizers.

Butylated hydroxy anisole and butylated hydroxytoluene

Synthetic antioxidants used to extend shelf life. They are likely carcinogens and hormone disruptors and may cause liver damage. Found in: lipsticks, moisturizers, diaper creams, and other cosmetics.

Coal tar:

A known carcinogen banned in the eu but still used in north america.

Used in dry skin treatments, anti-lice and anti-dandruff shampoos, also listed as a color plus number (ie fd&c red no. 6)

Dea/tea/mea:

Suspected carcinogen used as an emulsifier and foaming agent for shampoos, body washes, soaps.

Ethoxylated surfactants and 1,4-dioxane:

Never listed because it's a by-product made from adding carcinogenic ethylene oxide to make other chemicals less harsh. The environmental working group (ewg) has found 1,4-dioxane in 57% of baby washes in the us. Avoid any ingredients containing letters "eth.

Ethylenediaminetetraacetic acid (edta)

A chelating (binding) agent added to cosmetics to improve stability. May be toxic to organs. Found in: hair color, moisturizers."

Ethanolamines (mea/dea/tea)

Surfactants and ph adjuster linked to allergies, skin toxicity, hormone disruption, and inhibited fetal brain development. Found in: hair dyes, mascara, foundation, fragrances, sunscreens, dry cleaning solvents, paint, pharmaceuticals.

Formaldehyde:

Probably cancer causing carcinogen and irritant found in nail products, hair dye, fake eyelash adhesives, shampoos. Banned in the eu

Fragrance/perfume:

An engineered scent or flavoring agent that may contain any combination of 3,000-plus stock chemical ingredients, including hormone disruptors and allergens. Fragrance formulas are protected under federal law's classification of trade secrets and therefore can remain undisclosed. Found in: all types of cosmetics.

Hydroquinone:

Banned in the UK, rated most toxic on the EWG's Skin Deep database. A skin-lightening chemical that inhibits the production of melanin and is linked to cancer, organ toxicity, and skin irritation. Found in: skin-lightening creams.

Lead:

Known carcinogen found in lipstick and hair dye, but never listed because it's a contaminant, not an ingredient.

Mercury:

Known allergen that impairs brain development. Found in mascara and some eye drops.

Methylisothiazolinone and methylchloroisothiazolinone

Chemical preservatives that are among the most common irritants, sensitizers, and causes of contact skin allergies. Found in: shampoo, conditioner, body wash.

Mineral oil:

By-product of petroleum that's used in baby oil, moisturizers, styling gels. It creates a film that impairs the skin's ability to release toxins

Oxybenzone:

Active ingredient in chemical sunscreens that accumulates in fatty tissues and is linked to allergies, hormone disruption (increases estrogen), cellular damage, low birth weight. Found in sunscreen + moisturizer.

Parabens (methyl-, isobutyl-, propyl- and others):

A class of preservatives commonly used to prevent the growth of bacteria and mold. Parabens are endocrine (or hormone) disruptors, which may alter important hormone mechanisms in our bodies. Found in: shampoo, face cleanser, body wash, body lotion, foundation.

Small amounts of ethylene oxide and 1,4-dioxane, which are both carcinogens. Found in: creams, sunscreen, shampoo.

Phthalates (dbp, dehp, dep and others):

A class of plasticizing chemicals used to make products more pliable or to make fragrances stick to skin. Phthalates disrupt the endocrine system and may cause birth defects. Found in: synthetic fragrance, nail polish, hairspray, and plastic materials.

Polyethylene glycol (peg compounds):

Pegs are widely used in cosmetics as thickeners, solvents, softeners, and moisture-carriers. Depending on manufacturing processes, pegs may be contaminated with measurable amounts of ethylene oxide and 1,4-dioxane, which are both carcinogens. Found in: creams, sunscreen, shampoo.

Paraphenylenediamine (ppd):

Used in hair products and dyes but toxic to skin and immune system.

Placental extract:

Used in some skin and hair products- it is linked to endocrine hormone disruption

Retinyl palmitate (vitamin a palmitate):

An ingredient composed of palmitic acid and retinol (vitamin a). Data from an fda study indicate that retinyl palmitate, when applied to the skin in the presence of sunlight, may result in adverse health consequences like lesions and photosensitization. Fda, norwegian and german health agencies have raised a concern that daily skin application of vitamin a creams may contribute to excessive vitamin a intake for pregnant women and other populations.

Silicone-derived emollients: used to make a product feel soft, these don't biodegrade, and prevent skin from breathing. Linked to tumor growth and skin irritation.

Sodium lauryl (ether) sulfate (sls, sles):

A former industrial degreaser now used to make soap foamy, it's a toxin absorbed into the body and irritates skin.

Talc:

Similar to asbestos in composition, it's found in baby powder, eye shadow, blush, dry shampoo, and deodorant. Linked to ovarian cancer and respiratory problems.

Toluene:

Known to disrupt the immune and endocrine systems, and negatively impact fetal development. It's used in nail and hair products. Often hidden under "fragrance."

Triclosan:

Found in antibacterial products, hand sanitizers, and deodorants, it is linked to cancer and endocrine disruption.