

In 2004 I attended my first anti-aging medical convention in the states. I found the information that I acquired there fascinating and decided to look into it further. I was especially taken with all of the new technology available for aiding the skin in healing. Naturopathic Medicine is amazing at healing skin issues from the inside out, but at best can be slow to create change. So when I discovered that a machine like an IPL (intense pulsed light) system would be able to speed the healing of broken blood vessels, rosacea and acne, I had to purchase my own. In 2005 when I purchased my IPL system and began using it on my patients' skin, they then started to ask my opinion on what beauty products I would suggest. I had no idea! And so, my research into the world of natural/organic beauty and personal hygiene products began. And quite the journey it has been.

One of the first things that I learned was that there seem to be two major camps of beauty products. Those which are very effective, but full of toxic chemicals and those which are beautifully organic and eco-conscious, but completely ineffective unless you are 20 years old and already have perfect skin. With the skin absorbing approximately 60 per cent of what you put on it, I felt the effective-yet-toxic category was not an option for me to recommend. So I had to further explore the growing, yet very new world of effective organic/natural beauty and hygiene products.

"Green washing" was a term that I quickly learned with my research. Many companies, in an effort to get in on the organic movement, will use very carefully worded statements to describe their products as natural or organic. In doing this they hedge around the fact that their products also contain toxic chemical ingredients or at the very least a very small amount of anything that would be considered 'organic' or 'natural'."

The word "natural" printed on a skin care product apparently doesn't always mean the product is all natural. A cosmetic company is allowed to call its skin care product natural if just one ingredient used in producing the product comes from a natural substance; even when that one natural ingredient is chemically enhanced

and altered making it unrecognizable, the product can still be called natural.

A product that is called "organic" may not be 100 per cent organic. A company is permitted to call its product organic with just 70 per cent organic ingredients. The other 30 per cent of the ingredients used to make the product can be anything the manufacturer chooses to put in the product. And along with this came the real eye opener, that organic on a label does not mean chemical-free. Once I learned this I then began to educate myself on what chemicals may be contained in many easily available beauty items; what the chemicals are used for and what harm they may cause.

The David Suzuki Foundation released the results of a major study in 2010 and named the "Dirty Dozen" ingredients that should be avoided in personal care products to decrease health risks. They are as follows;

BHA and BHT: Often in moisturizer and cosmetics, may cause some forms of cancer and interfere with hormonal function.

Coal Tar dyes: In many hair dyes and colours. Potentially cause cancer and can be contaminated with heavy metals which are toxic to proper brain function.

Cyclomethicone and siloxanes: Widely used in moisturizers, cosmetics and hair products. May interfere with hormonal function and damage the liver.

DEA, MEA and TEA: In creamy and foaming products. Can react to form cancer-causing nitrosamines.

Dibutyl Phthalate: In nail products, especially polish. Toxic to reproduction and may cause hormonal imbalance.

Formaldehyde-releasing preservatives: Look for DMDM Hydantoin, Diazolidinyl urea, Imidazolidinyl urea, methenamine or Quaternium-15. Formaldehyde causes cancer.

Parabens: Widely used as a preservative. Associated with breast cancer and hormonal imbalance. Now illegal in Europe and recently in California.

Parfum: Widely used in scented and unscented products. These chemicals can trigger asthma, allergies, cancer and neurotoxicity.



Petrolatum (mineral oil): In hair products, lip balm and lipstick; skin care products. Can be contaminated by cancer-causing impurities and over time can encourage dry skin.

Sodium Laureth sulfate (SLES) and Sodium Lauryl Sulfate (SLS): In products that foam or lather. These chemicals often contain 1, 4-dioxane, which can cause cancer and/or liver damage.

Triclosan: Is used in "anti-bacterial" products and may interfere with hormones and contribute to anti-biotic resistant bacteria.

Quite the list of offenders. And this is not all of the things to watch for in products. We are constantly being exposed to toxic chemicals from almost every thing we eat, drink, wear, wash with and apply to our skin. The average woman uses 12 personal care products each day, possibly exposing herself to 168 different chemicals.

When I started to learn all of this information it made my head spin. Why are these ingredients permitted in commonly used products? Who's watching out for us? And what average person has the time or knowledge to check every label, every time they shop? Thankfully, certification has become a bigger deal in Canada. The David Suzuki Foundations and groups like Ecocert are making our decisions easier.

Eco-certification began in France in 1991 and in the past few years has become international. A big problem in the past with things being certified organic has been that regulations greatly varied due to the number of certification boards worldwide. A trailblazer in this field, Ecocert created and introduced the "Natural and organic cosmetics" standard in 2003. A cosmetic certified as organic by Ecocert must be labelled "Ecocert-certified ecological and/or organic cosmetic" and may display the Ecocert certification logo. Its criteria are among the most stringent on the market

requiring at least 95 per cent natural ingredients in the finished product. No GMO - genetically modified organisms, ingredients derived from petrochemicals or synthetic chemistry and no testing of the finished product on animals. The whole manufacturing process is controlled, up to the packing stage, and the packaging and outer packaging must be biodegradable or recyclable, with the labeling being transparent for the consumer.

For more information here are two great websites. The Skin Deep data base at www.cosmeticdatabase.org/ where you can search any product or ingredient that you want more information on. Also at www.davidsuzuki.org/issues/health/science/toxics/dirty-dozen-cosmetic-chemicals/ not only can you get more information on the chemicals that I have just mentioned, but the website has a great pamphlet that you can print off and take with you in your pocket or purse for when you next go shopping, to make sure that you buy healthy.

If you're not using certified organic skin care products you are likely feeding your skin chemicals, some of which will be stored in your body tissue, most of them for many months, if not longer. We are still figuring out the long term issues to this kind of continued exposure to so many different toxic chemicals. Now that you have choice and the decisions are being made easier for you, doesn't it make sense to check the labels of what you currently use on your body and maybe make different decisions next time you shop?

Dr. Cheryl Lycette, N.D. has been practicing Naturopathic medicine for over 17 years, is a member (and co-founder) of the Nova Scotia Naturopathic Association and owns the Be Well Spa, Atlantic Canada's first organic and chemical free spa, with her husband, Brian Nichols.

did you KNOW?

The Early Intervention Program (EIP) invites NSTU members to sign up for our Wellness email list at Be_Well@nstu.ca.

Please contact Erin at ekeefe@staff.nstu.ca to provide her with your NSTU email address. The Be_Well@nstu.ca list will provide information about the EIP and other wellness topics.

