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How do you make sure you choose products that are not harmful to your health?

If household and personal care products that we buy from store shelves contain toxic substances, it is a puzzle to find out what they are and how to avoid them. And yet, these products often contain many! Daily exposure to these substances is associated with various health effects, including some cancers, fertility problems, allergies, asthma and other disabling effects for people suffering from environmental sensitivities/multiple chemical sensitivities. In fact, it is because the current Canadian regulations are not rigorous enough to allow Canadians to make informed choices: the industry is not even required to display the ingredient list on the household product label. For cosmetics, this is required, although this is not always done clearly, and it is exempt from disclosing the ingredients of perfumes and fragrances, while these can also be toxic (Environmental Defence, 2017). In any case, even when listed on a label, the health effects caused by these substances are not mentioned while reading their complex chemical nomenclature. The best way to know the content of your products is to make them yourself. However, for

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a variety of reasons, we do not all have the time or the energy to do so. Here are three tips to make the best possible choices when you shop for products.

1. Look for official logos

When reading the label of a product, it is important to be aware that manufacturers frequently write terms such as "natural," "organic," "ecological" even though this is not really the case. Even terms such as "perfume-free" or "fragrance-free" can be misleading because they are not regulated. One way to make sure that the content of the product is safe is to search for official logos, but beware! Companies publicize their own in-house "green logos" which are not verified by public authorities and therefore have no real credibility (Boivin et al., 2010). The two main official Eco certification labels to look for on the products you buy in Canada are: Ecologo and Ecocert. Several other official logos exist from many countries, but you'll see them less frequently. The table shows some of them that you can rely on.

Program name	Logo	Origin of the program
UL ECOLOGO		North America
Ecocert		France
EWG		United States
Green Seal		United States
Ecolabel		European Union

2. Check your products using a mobile app

In recent years, some organizations have worked to facilitate consumer choice by creating product databases. The 'Think Dirty' and 'Healthy Living' (EWG) mobile apps allow you to search for a product's name or scan your barcode with your phone's camera. These apps list all the ingredients contained in the product and classify them according to their level of harm with a color code. As new products and brands are continually appearing on the market, these databases do not provide information on all products. However, the two apps complement each other well. For now, the Healthy Living app only lists cosmetics, but a new database for household cleaning products is available on their website.



Think Dirty



Healthy Living

3. Avoid toxic ingredients

If you cannot find official logos and the product is not in the databases app, you can look at the ingredients yourself. Although the industry uses several

thousand different chemicals, especially in cosmetics, some are repeated more often or are of greater concern. Refer to ASEQ-EHAQ's Eco Living Guide www.EcoLivingGuide.ca to identify them.

Ingredients to avoid

- Aluminum;
- Benzene;
- BHA or BHT
- Bisphenol A;
- Carbopol (carbomer);
- Colorant/colour;
- DEA (diethanolamine): Cocamide DEA, oleamide DEA and lauramide DEA;
- DEET and other pesticides;
- Diazolidinyl urea and imidazolidinyl urea;
- Glycol ethers: Polyethylene glycol (PEG) and propylene glycol (PG);
- Formaldehyde;
- Mineral oil or 'white oil';
- Hydantoin DMDM;
- Sodium hydroxymethylglycinate;
- Sodium lauryl sulphate (SLS) and sodium laureth (or lauryl ether) sulphate (SLES);
- MEA (monoethanolamin)
- Methenamine;
- Nitrates/nitrites;
- Parabens;
- Perfume/perfume or fragrance(s);
- Petrolatum;
- Phenoxyethanol;
- Phthalates (DMP, DEP, DBP, DnBP, BBzP, DEHP, DINP, DIDP, BBP, DNOP);
- p-Phenylenediamine (PPD);
- Quaternium-15;
- Flavor;
- Silicone: dimethicone (PDMS);
- Siloxanes: cyclomethicone, cyclotetrasiloxane;
- Sulfites;
- TEOA/TEA (triethanolamine);
- Triclosan;

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