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Harmful Chemicals in Your Makeup: Part II

There is a new trend in the beauty world that is growing in popularity under the name of “clean makeup” (*The Good Face Project*, 2020). Many brands including well-known ones such as Covergirl have decided to invest in the production of “clean”, i.e., non-toxic beauty products. As the title implies, these products are meant to be free of harmful chemicals, but just as with many other labels like “organic”, “green”, and “natural”, one question remains: can the consumer truly trust “clean” cosmetics?

Unfortunately, there are currently no certified logos that could help the consumer trust that a product is indeed clean. However, most brands that claim to be “clean” operate by following two important rules in the manufacture of their cosmetics:

1. They omit toxic ingredients as backed by science and/or by public health agencies.
2. They create transparent ingredient labels that identify all chemicals present in the product regardless of how good or bad they are.

The lack of credibility in the label leaves it up to the consumer to be proactive in their shopping habits and to take the time to research and analyze each product.

The following article aims to serve as a quick guide to help consumers pick the right products. It will go over cosmetic ingredient lists, trusted brands, and the cost-benefit analysis involved in product selection.

Reading the Often-Tedious Ingredients List: Tips & Tricks

The easiest way to identify toxins in your product is to look at its ingredients list. However, oftentimes, it is difficult for consumers to remember the names of the many harmful chemicals and to compare them to the other chemicals on the list. In fact, many consumers may misjudge chemicals simply based on the complexity of its name. For example, the terms “ascorbic acid” may seem daunting at first glance, but it is simply the scientific name for vitamin C. So, how can consumers bypass these challenges?

Keeping Lists: In your purse/wallet or on your phone, maintain a list of the ten to twelve most harmful chemicals that are found in makeup (see below). This will serve as a reference when you are evaluating ingredient labels. Make sure to write down the full name of chemicals and not just



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their abbreviations.

- Butylated hydroxyanisole (BHA) and Butylated hydroxytoluene (BHT)
- Coal tar dyes
- Diethanolamine (DEA) and related ingredients
- Dibutyl phthalate
- Formaldehyde
- Parabens
- Parfum/fragrance
- Polyethylene glycol (PEG) compounds
- Petrolatum
- Siloxanes
- Sodium laureth sulfate
- Triclosan

(David Suzuki Foundation, 2020)

Prepared Shopping: Reading ingredients lists can be time-consuming, especially if you are in a store surrounded by thousands of products. Thus, if possible, rely on online stores where you can easily filter out what you are looking for. This will also allow you to pick your products out ahead of time in order for you to go in store and get exactly what you want.

AQUA / WATER / EAU, PROPYLENE GLYCOL, STYRENE/**ACRYLATES**/AMMONIUM **METHACRYLATE** COPOLYMER, POLYURETHANE-35, CERA ALBA / BEESWAX / CIRE D'ABEILLE, SYNTHETIC FLUORPHLOGOPITE, GLYCERYL STEARATE, CETYL ALCOHOL, PEG-200 GLYCERYL STEARATE, ETHYLENEDIAMINE/STEARYL DIMER DILINOLEATE COPOLYMER, COPERNICIA CERIFERA CERA / CARNAUBA WAX / CIRE DE CARNAUBA, STEARIC ACID, PALMITIC ACID, ETHYLENE/VA COPOLYMER, ALCOHOL DENAT., CAMELLIA SINENSIS LEAF EXTRACT, **PARAFFIN**, GLYCERIN, **SODIUM LAURETH SULFATE**, MYRISTIC ACID, AMINOMETHYL PROPANEDIOL, DISODIUM EDTA, HYDROXYETHYLCELLULOSE, CAPRYLIC/CAPRIC TRIGLYCERIDE, CAPRYLYL GLYCOL, TETRASODIUM EDTA, XANTHAN GUM, BUTYLENE GLYCOL, PENTAERYTHRITYL TETRA-DI-T-BUTYL HYDROXYHYDROCINNAMATE, POTASSIUM SORBATE, PHENOXYETHANOL, [+/- MAY CONTAIN / PEUT CONTENIR CI 77499 / IRON OXIDES

Simplicity: The length of the ingredients' list for safe products can vary, but a general rule of thumb is that safer products will have lists that are shorter and contain ingredients that are easier to understand. See example below:

JOJOBA ESTERS, GLYCERIN, HYDROGENATED **OLIVE OIL**, CAPRYLOYL GLYCERIN/SEBACIC ACID COPOLYMER, TRIBEHENIN, GLYCERYL STEARATE, **BEESWAX** / CERA ALBA / CIRE D'ABEILLE, MICA, **SAMBUCUS NIGRA (ELDERBERRY) FRUIT EXTRACT**, **ALTHAEA OFFICINALIS (MARSHMALLOW) ROOT EXTRACT**, CETEARYL ALCOHOL, SILICA, HYDROGENATED **SUNFLOWER SEED OIL** POLYGLYCERYL-3 ESTERS, HYDROGENATED SUNFLOWER SEED OIL GLYCERYL ESTERS, SODIUM STEAROYL LACTYLATE, TIN OXIDE, TITANIUM DIOXIDE (CI 77891), IRON OXIDES (CI 77491).



Mobile Applications: There are many applications that you can use to see how your products qualify. Apps like *EWG* and *Think Dirty* are great for this purpose as they identify the safety level of various products through some sort of defined score. The downside of these applications is that their databases are not always complete, meaning that they may not contain information on some of the products that you are inquiring about.

Familiar Brands: Acquaint yourself with brands that only produce cosmetics without dirty ingredients. Be conscious of the environment and go for local brands whenever possible. Below are some Canadian brands that produce non-toxic makeup products:

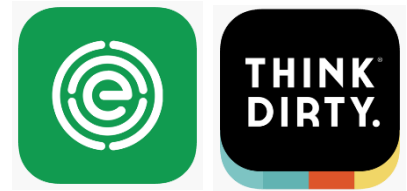
- RMS Beauty (Vancouver)
- Zorah Cosmetics (Montreal)
- Plume Cosmetics (Calgary)
- ILIA (Vancouver)
- Bite Beauty (Toronto)
- Miëlle (Montreal)
- Omy Laboratoires (Montreal)
- Jazmin Saraï (Montreal)
- BKIND (Montreal)
- Deux Cosmétiques (Montreal)
- See more here: [Very Joëlle – Ethical Fashion & Clean Beauty](#)

Costs Versus Benefits: What Are You Okay With?

As mentioned in part I of this article series, the dose and number of exposures hold a lot of significance for your health. Even chemicals that are legal for use can be toxic when used regularly as the total dosage increases. This is particularly worrisome for chemicals that can bioaccumulate and persist in your body for an unsafe amount of time.

Here are a couple of questions to ask yourself:

- Am I going to be using [product name] daily or multiple times a day?
- Am I going to use a large quantity of [product name] during each use?
- Am I generally prone to develop a negative reaction from the use of topical products?
- Am I going to wear [product name] for a long time during the day?
- Does [product name] contain a harmful chemical?



If your answer to any of these questions is “yes”, the costs of using toxic cosmetics may outweigh the benefits that you can obtain from them. Shop wisely.



References

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