



Organic *Beauty*

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UNDERSTANDING INGREDIENTS: WHAT PATIENTS PUT ON THEIR SKIN EVENTUALLY ENDS UP IN THEIR BODIES

Think of beauty products the same way you do the food that you put in your body. Top chefs in elegant restaurants use high-quality ingredients, fresh herbs, and real spices. They do not use artificial flavors or synthetic ingredients simply because it would compromise the integrity of their food.

The recent increase in public awareness of the actual ingredients contained within the food we eat has led mindful consumers to become “label readers” in an effort to control what they put into their bodies. The international organic food production has grown at a rate of around 20 percent a year since the early 1990s. Naturally, the trends of organic beauty products have begun to run parallel with those of the organic food industry, growing by 15 percent annually over the past fifteen years. However, such extensive growth of the industry has placed “organic” labeled products under the scrutiny of watchful consumers.

Nowhere does the label “organic” take a more gratuitous bruising than in the beauty products industry. There are clear guidelines for

organic food because organic industry standards were designed specifically for food production. When you see the word organic on a beauty product, it may not mean exactly what you presume it to mean. Minimal regulation has allowed for grossly inadequate labeling.

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European-based organizations have begun attempts at creating an international industry standard, requiring high levels of organic ingredients – anywhere from 85-95 percent. Although these standards give consumers the impression that little or no chemical ingredients are in the product, they have received harsh criticism from the Organic Consumers Association for being too lax: Organic water or aloe vera

extracts often “greenwash” synthetic ingredients and preservatives, as water represents around 85% of products like shampoo and body wash. As a result, these standards are often useless and may deliberately mislead organic consumers who are looking for a reliable indicator of true “organic” product integrity. Recognizing these deficiencies, others have stepped up efforts to create universal standards for organic labeling. Three worldwide leaders in the creation of such standards are OASIS, Eco-Cert, and NaTrue.

OASIS

OASIS, Organic and Sustainable Industry Standards, has taken a unique stance toward organic production. They maintain that some beauty products require chemistry as a necessary part of production, and that processing can involve either good or bad chemistry. Good or “green” chemistry is defined as the use of environmentally friendly chemicals and processes that result in reduced waste, safer products, and the reduced use of energy and resources. In contrast, bad chemistry creates dangerous byproducts as the result of chemical processes. Formaldehyde is one such example of a byproduct of processing techniques used to make petroleum-based ingredients gentler to the skin. OASIS is also working to offer standards for sustainable packaging and household cleaners, as well as other products.

ECO-CERT

Eco-Cert is another corporation that certifies standards for natural and organic cosmetics. Their standards state that 95% of the ingredients contained in a finished product must be organic to obtain an “organic” label, and 50% organic for a “natural” label. They have also incorporated packaging into their standards of an “organic” label. Eco-Cert requires that all packaging must be done with the strictest respect to the environment, using recyclable formats, with a reduced energy consumption, and without the use of polystyrene foam (PVC).

NaTRUE

NaTrue is an international non-profit that has developed a leveled system of grades exclusively for cosmetics. One star is given to products deemed natural cosmetics, two stars for natural cosmetics with organic ingredients, and three stars are given to wholly organic cosmetics. They, however, do not allow water to be used in the calculation of a recipe's natural ingredients.

USDA

Here in the U.S. the USDA does not currently define or regulate the term organic as it applies to beauty products, only as it applies to agricultural products. They have, however, begun attempts to establish a link between cosmetic products and organic agriculture. If a beauty product contains agricultural ingredients, it is eligible for USDA/NOP production, handling, processing, and labeling standards. For a beauty product to be marked with the 100% Organic USDA label, its products must contain only organically produced ingredients,



excluding water and salt. An Organic USDA label must include 95% produced organic ingredients, again excluding water and salt. The remaining ingredients must consist of non-organic substances, on an approved list, that are not commercially available in organic form.

Overall, the USDA's label is currently the most strict; but until national and international standards are in place, the responsibility still lies with us, as the consumers, to be aware of what ingredients are really in the products we purchase.

What are you putting into your body if you are using non-organic products?

- Propylene Glycol – In hair and on skin, propylene glycol works as a humescent. It causes retention of moisture content of skin or cosmetic products by preventing the escape of moisture or water. Known health effects of the chemical are: throat irritation, headache, backache, kidney problems, edema (swelling), and necrosis (cell death). Propylene glycol is so highly toxic, industrial workers are warned of severe health risks if contact occurs and are required to wear protective clothing, gloves, and goggles during handling. Risks of contact include but are not limited to brain, liver, and kidney abnormalities. Further, propylene glycol can only be disposed of in hazardous waste sites at a cost of \$500 to \$1000 per drum. Lucky for us, propylene glycol must be listed on the label.
- Formaldehyde and 1,4-dioxane – These are considered probable carcinogens by the Environmental Protection Agency. Both chemicals are linked to skin allergies, asthma, developmental and reproductive problems, and cancer. Unfortunately, avoiding these chemicals is not easy: A recent study by the Campaign for Safe Cosmetics found that 23 of 28 bath products they tested contained formaldehyde. More alarming, product labels do not have to list “formaldehyde” or

“1,4-dioxane,” because they are chemicals formed during the manufacturing process. The ingredients that are likely to contain these chemicals will be listed on the label as: peg-100 stearate, sodium laureth sulfate, polyethylene and cetareth-20, quaternium - 15, DMDM hydantoin, imidazolidinyl urea, diazolidinyl urea, and sodium hydroxymethoyleglycinate.

- Methyl, Propyl, Butyl and Ethyl Paraben – Some combination of these synthetic ingredients is in almost every skin and hair product made today. They are widely known to be highly toxic and cause allergic and/or skin reactions. Companies use these ingredients because they are extremely inexpensive and extend the shelf life of products by inhibiting microbial growth. Look for these chemicals labeled as: butylparaben, ethylparaben, methylparaben, isobutylparaben, and propylparaben.
- Synthetic Colors, Labeled as FD&C, or D&C followed by a number, such as FD&C Red #6 – These substances are usually coal-tar based and have been identified as cancer-causing ingredients.
- Synthetic Fragrances and Dyes – These are known allergens and neurotoxins and have been linked to hormone disruption concerns and cancer. Most will be listed only as “fragrance.” Some dyes are even banned outside of the United States.

MIS-LABELED PERSONAL CARE PRODUCTS

As recently as November of 2009 the National Organics Standards Board (NOSB) passed a recommendation for solving the problem of mislabeled organic personal care products. In it they urged the USDA National Organic Program (NOP) to verify that any use of the word “organic” on a personal care product is backed up by third-party certification that passes USDA organic standards. As a result of these efforts, the NOSB has been able to compile a list of USDA certified


organic brands that are true to their claims and safe for organic consumers.

COMING CLEAN CAMPAIGN

The Organic Consumers Association has begun a voluntary campaign called “Coming Clean: Campaigning for Organic Integrity in Organic Beauty Products.” They, along with a number of certified organic personal care brands, filed a complaint on behalf of 50 million organic product consumers to urge the USDA to regulate cosmetics as they do food.

POTENTIAL RISKS

Despite the research into the potential toxic and carcinogenic properties of chemicals and synthetic ingredients, these ingredients are still used in everyday beauty products. Not one beauty product corporation warns consumers of the presence of carcinogens in its products, or of the dangers they may pose. It is essential for us, as consumers, to remain aware of the potential risks of using products labeled “natural” or “organic.” The basic fact is, despite the claims made by manufacturers, we do not need harsh chemicals and additives to take care of our bodies. Companies prefer to use these chemicals as an alternative to

natural ingredients because they reduce the cost of manufacturing large quantities of beauty products. As educated consumers, we cannot afford to wait for universal organic labeling standards to emerge. The responsibility is ours to act with our own interests in mind, by choosing products that are safe, healthy, and environmentally responsible. 

Resources

1. NSF, National Science Foundation
2. OASIS Organics
3. USDA, United States Department of Agriculture
4. NaTrue
5. National Cancer Institute, Formaldehyde Fact Sheet
6. Campaign for Safe Cosmetics Full Report
7. Personal Care Products Council
8. Best in Beauty, Labels for Life
9. Skin Deep, Cosmetic Safety Database
10. Saffron Rouge
11. National Organic Consumers Association



About
the
Author

Emily Stocker steps into the business of being green (and happy) with Em's Organics, offering products like sea sponge soap made from USDA Organic ingredients and baby and children's clothing and accessories. And that's just the beginning. Why buy organic products? Because they're better.

Visit her website: www.EmsOrganics.com, which will officially launch on April 22nd, Earth Day.

