Pretty Scary: The Dangers Hidden in Your Personal Care Products

By Dr. Alyssa Musgrove

According to the Environmental Working Group (EWG), women use an average of 12 personal care products a day, exposing them to about 168 chemicals. Men use an average of 6 products a day, resulting in exposure to about 85 different chemicals.

Sound far-fetched? Here’s just a sampling of what you may be unknowingly applying to your skin daily:

* Deodorant soap contains ammonia, formaldehyde and phenol (known carcinogens) and triclocarban, which is under suspicion of being a cancer-causing agent with daily use.
* Shampoo contains cocamide DEA, which is associated with carcinogenic nitrosamines, and sodium lauryl sulfate, a known mutagen.
* Shaving cream contains a-pinene, a chemical that damages the immune system.
* Body lotion contains mineral oil, which, as a cosmetic grade petroleum product, includes the contaminant polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PHAs), which can mimic estrogen in the body.
* Deodorant has aluminum, which is being tested in connection to Alzheimer’s and breast cancer.
* Toothpaste contains saccharin and FD&C Blue#1, which are carcinogens. One brand, Colgate Total, contains triclosan – an endocrine disruptor linked to tumor growth in mice. The use of triclosan in hand soap was banned by the FDA in 2016.
* Moisturizer contains PEG-40, which contains dangerous levels of dioxin and propylene glycol, which studies show can negatively alter brain waves and cause liver and kidney disorders.
* Perfume contains toluene, a suspected potent carcinogen, and benzaldehyde, which is a central nervous system depressant that may cause kidney damage.
* Sunscreen contains padimate O and the preservative, BNPD, which together creates the carcinogenic nitrosamine, NMPABAO. Many also contain oxybenzone, an endocrine disruptor linked to early puberty in girls, low sperm count and male infertility and an increase in hormone-related cancers in men and women.

Since World War II, the United States has introduced over 80,000 chemicals – many with no safety data. And, unfortunately, when it comes to the chemicals being used in the skincare and beauty industry, there is very little regulation.

The Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act took effect in 1938 and has not changed since. The act does not require cosmetic companies to disclose their ingredients to the FDA, or any governmental entity, before products hit the shelves. That means products are sent to market and only removed if there are issues that arise, be it allergies or long-term health effects. Essentially, these products and chemicals are innocent until proven guilty.

Of the 113 agents listed by the International Agency for Research on Cancer as Group 1 human carcinogens, the Campaign for Safe Cosmetics reports that at least 11 of them have been, or are currently being used, in personal care products. We saw the problem with these chemicals firsthand when, in 2016, Johnson & Johnson was ordered to pay $72 million dollars in damages for the death of a woman from ovarian cancer that was caused by the talc in their baby powder.

The European Union has restricted or banned 1,400 harmful chemicals and ingredients from personal care products because of research showing their potential to act as carcinogens, endocrine disruptors, neurotoxins, reproductive toxins, or skin, lung or eye irritants. In Canada, the number of restricted ingredients is about 600. The United States has restricted or banned only 30.

The skin is our largest organ. What goes on the body, goes in the body. If you’re doing what you can to stay healthy – eating right and exercising – you should also be taking a look at the toxic exposure you may be getting from your personal care products. The low-dose exposure to the chemicals in these products can add up over time. So, it makes sense to make changes where you can. Here are some tips to make it easier:

1. Do your research. Look past marketing phrases such as “natural” and “organic” and read the labels.
2. Start small. You don’t have to replace all your products at once. Rather, begin focusing on the products that cover the most surface area of your skin. For example, consider replacing your sunscreen or makeup foundation before your eyeshadow or mascara.
3. Head to the kitchen. There are several products in your kitchen that can do double duty in your beauty routine. Coconut oil can be used as a makeup remover, cleanser, moisturizer and hair mask.
4. Evaluate the products you are currently using by looking them up on the Think Dirty app or the EWG’s Skin Deep database (www.ewg.org/skindeep), which have rated the safety of hundreds of personal care products.
5. Explore some of the many chemical-free product options. Some favorites I have tried include products from Acure Organics and Honest Company, as well as locally-made products from Harvest Moon Garden.

Finally, remember beauty comes from the inside out. Eat plenty of healthy fats (such as omega-3 fish oils and flaxseed oil), as well as a variety of colorful, antioxidant-rich fruits and vegetables. Also, stay hydrated. Drinking 6-8 glasses of water a day keeps skin looking healthy and helps flush out toxins.

*Pathways to Healing specializes in holistic chiropractic care. Dr. Alyssa Musgrove draws on a variety of techniques, including chiropractic, kinesiology, nutrition, food allergy testing and lifestyle counseling to assist clients in achieving optimal health and wellness in one setting. In addition, the practice is committed to being a valuable source of information so that people can learn how to live a healthy lifestyle and prevent future illness. Pathways to Healing is located at 1022 Founders Row, Lake Oconee Village, Greensboro. The office can be reached at 706-454-2040.*