



Dr. Dennis Perman ::

Message of The Week



Your Cosmetics May Be Hurting You

June 23, 2014

Dear Doctor:

I saw a disturbing post on Buzzfeed this week, claiming that cosmetic companies don't have the same kind of regulation that the food industry has, and that therefore those companies can use whatever ingredients they want in commonly sold cosmetic products. In fact, while Europe has banned 1,373 different chemicals, in the US only eight such substances have been disallowed.

And it gets worse from there. Formaldehyde, which most people recognize as embalming fluid, is known to cause cancer, and yet it is often included in nail polish, hair gel, shampoos, and lotions.

Triclosan, which disrupts hormone function, is put into soaps, deodorants, and toothpastes, while paraben, which has been found in breast tumor tissue, is a component of many lotions and ointments.

Ethylene oxide, also a carcinogen, is part of many fragrances and shampoos, and the grand-daddy of contaminants, lead, which is a potent neurotoxin that causes learning and behavioral conditions among other problems, is part of many lipsticks, foundation make-ups, and over 600 other cosmetics.

There are no laws requiring the cosmetic companies to prove the safety of their products, and there aren't even legal definitions of many of the claims they make, such as "natural," "organic," "not tested on animals" or "cruelty free." That means the companies can do virtually as they wish without restraint or penalty. This is frightening, since most of us realize that anything we put on our skin can get inside our bodies, and if we can't count on the accuracy of the information we get, we may be at risk.

I have railed at the pharmaceutical companies and the food industry about their indiscretions, disregarding public interest in favor of profit. But I had no idea that the cosmetics manufacturers and distributors were polluting our environment and our bodies with these horrifyingly poisonous substances. In fact, "new and improved" sometimes means they have made the particles of the toxins smaller and therefore easier to absorb – for example, imagine applying deodorant to freshly shaven armpits, giving the chemicals easy access through tender skin – that can't be good.

Even if you don't use cosmetics, as many do not, you may still be in jeopardy – for example, women who wear lipstick may ingest a substantial amount over a lifetime, and so do the men who kiss them. And people who bite their nails get a smorgasbord of hair and skin products and make-up, if they ever scratch their heads, rub their eyes or stroke their chins.

We need to be more cautious about the products we choose, and read the labels to fully grasp the contents. If the regulators won't look out for us, we need to look out for ourselves, and monitor what we are putting on our skin. There are numerous green alternatives available for savvy consumers.

Ultimately, it is our responsibility – as incomplete as the oversight may be on food, it is less for cosmetics. Decide thoughtfully what you want to put on your body, as well as in it -- caveat emptor, let the buyer beware. There are natural products that work as well or better – find them and use them.

Dennis Perman DC,
for The Masters Circle

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