

# BACKWASH

## Did you know?

The FDA has tried to legally define the term “hypoallergenic” but was struck down by the courts. Products with this label are normally found on products that contain fewer known allergens.

Terms like “alcohol-free” and “unscented” have no significance from a regulatory standpoint. “Alcohol-free” products may be devoid of ethyl or isopropyl alcohol, but others may be present. Look for ingredients ending with “-ol” to spot alcohol in a product. “Unscented” products typically lack a distinct odor, but can contain a small amount of masking fragrance.

A noncomedogenic or nonacnegenic product normally means that the product doesn’t contain ingredients known to clog pores, but the FDA hasn’t specifically defined these terms.

The terms “cruelty-free” and “no animal testing” are not legally defined. Most companies avoid animal testing and rely on information from science journals, lab tests or tests on humans. Others may use these claims even when they commission independent laboratories to test individual ingredients on animals.

The leaping bunny symbol indicates a product is certified by the Coalition for Consumer Information on Cosmetics; an international coalition of animal protection groups.



Many big name companies do test products, but the FDA doesn’t require supporting evidence for any claims made before a product is placed on the shelf.

False claims are illegal but since terms like “allergy tested” or “dermatologist tested” aren’t formally defined, it might be difficult for the FDA to take action against companies who misuse these terms.

Over the course of keeping watch on the cosmetic industry, the FDA has only banned eleven body care product ingredients.

Sunscreens and physical sunblocks have been found to generate free radicals when exposed to sunlight, which then can attack the nuclei of your skin cells and cause mutations.

# STAY CLEAN

## Additional resources

### Organic Consumers Association

[www.organicconsumers.org](http://www.organicconsumers.org)

The Organic Consumers Association (OCA) is an online and grass roots non-profit 501(c)3 public interest organization campaigning for health, justice, and sustainability. The OCA deals with crucial issues of food safety, industrial agriculture, genetic engineering, children’s health, corporate accountability, Fair Trade, environmental sustainability and other key topics.

### Environmental Working Group

[www.ewg.org/home](http://www.ewg.org/home)

The mission of the Environmental Working Group (EWG) is to use the power of public information to protect public health and the environment.

### Organic.org

[www.organic.org](http://www.organic.org)

Provides information about the benefits of going organic.

### Skin Deep Cosmetics Database

[www.cosmeticsdatabase.com](http://www.cosmeticsdatabase.com)

Skin Deep is a safety guide to cosmetics and personal care products brought to you by researchers at the Environmental Working Group.

### FDA - Cosmetics

[www.fda.gov/cosmetics](http://www.fda.gov/cosmetics)

Information regarding the FDA’s role in the regulation and marketing of cosmetics.

### The Healthy Person’s Guide to Personal Care Ingredients

<http://www.terressentials.com/ingredientguide.html>

A guide to both truly natural and synthetic ingredients--a quick reference to help you make an educated decision about what ingredients you want to rub on your skin, put in your body and put into our waterways.

### Green America

[www.greenamericatoday.org](http://www.greenamericatoday.org)

The mission of Green America is mission is to harness economic power - the strength of consumers, investors, businesses, and the marketplace - to create a socially just and environmentally sustainable society.

# COMING CLEAN

the dirty little secret  
behind body care products



The average American woman spends \$12,000 to \$15,000 a year on body care products.



Courtesy: Shutterstock Images

Overall, these products are part of a \$35 billion industry. Every day, the average adult uses nine personal care products that contain approximately 126 chemical ingredients. About a quarter of a million women, and one out of every 100 men use fifteen products daily.

However, approximately 89% of the 10,500 ingredients used in body care products have not been evaluated for safety. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) does not require health studies or pre-market requirements on “cosmetics”-

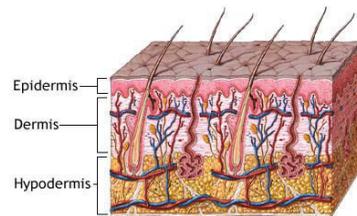
a category that can include anything from deodorants and mouthwash to lotions, shaving creams and body wash.

Instead, the safety of the ingredients in these products is monitored through a manufacturer-controlled safety committee called the Cosmetic Ingredient Review (CIR) panel. One independent study recently discovered ingredients that had been certified by the US government as “probable carcinogens” in 1 of every 120 cosmetic products. Consumers should be concerned about this dirty little secret behind well known and widely-used body care products.

Why? The answer is skin deep.

### Skin Basics

Our skin consists of three layers: the epidermis, dermis and subcutis (subcutaneous layer.) Of all the organs, the skin occupies the most surface area of our body. It functions as a semi-permeable barrier between us and our environment.



Many ingredients used in body care products pose a high health risk because of how readily they can be absorbed by the skin and carried through the bloodstream. When shopping for personal care products, there are several ingredients one should avoid.

However, be prepared to spend some time reading labels:

### Ingredients to Avoid

1. **“Fragrance”** can be one or more of over 200 chemicals. This catch-all term may mask phthalates, which act as endocrine disruptors and may cause obesity, reproductive and developmental harm. Health problems such as asthma, migraines, hyperactivity disorder, rashes, depression and seizures have been linked to synthetic chemical fragrances.



Courtesy: Shutterstock Images

2. **“Parabens”** (methyl-, ethyl-, propyl-, butyl-, isobutyl-) are a group of chemicals used as preservatives in lotions, conditioners, shampoos, sunscreens and deodorants. Synthetic preservatives are considered by leading dermatological associations to be the number one cause of contact dermatitis.

Some of the most allergenic and irritating preservatives release small amounts of formaldehyde, which is not only an irritant and skin sensitizer, but is cancer-causing and damaging to the nervous system.

Any product containing water or alcohol must contain some form of preservative.

3. **“Sodium Lauryl Sulfate”** (SLS) and **“Sodium Laureth Sulfate”** (SLES) are chemical surfactants (foaming agents) found in over 97% of body care products, even toothpaste. SLS and SLES have been attributed to brain and nervous system effects, liver damage, endocrine system disruption, biochemical changes, reproductive and cardiovascular effects, as well as eye damage. SLES is also suspected to be bioaccumulative.

4. **“1,4-Dioxane”** is a known carcinogen that may appear as a contaminant in products containing sodium laureth sulfate (SLS or SLES) and ingredients that include the terms “PEG,” “-xynol,” “-cetareth,” “oleth” and most other ethoxylated “eth” ingredients.

5. **“Antibacterial”** ingredients have become so prevalent that they are now used in laundry detergents, shampoos, toothpastes, body washes, dish soaps and many household cleaning products. Triclosan, a commonly used antibacterial agent, has been detected in breast milk, and one recent study found that it interferes with testosterone activity in cells.

6. **Propylene glycol** is the main ingredient in anti-freeze and is used in hydraulic fluids. In body care products it is used as a penetration enhancer. It acts as a carrier for other chemicals; bringing them into your skin and your bloodstream. It can be found in over 3000 products.

### Consumer Choice

Limiting the amount of exposure to chemical ingredients is difficult. However, there are several key ways in which consumers can limit this exposure and simultaneously express their concern over the use of dangerous chemicals in body care products.

As a consumer, demand is expressed through the purchase of products. Refusing to purchase products that contain potentially hazardous ingredients is an effective way to send a message to the cosmetics industry about their use of certain chemicals in their products.

#### *Knowledge is Power*

Understanding the labels on body care products can be overwhelming and confusing. Take a proactive stance by avoiding products that contain questionable ingredients all together by researching ingredients. Research and understanding give an individual the best control of their health and wellness.

#### *Less is More*

Choose to reduce or cut back the number of body care products used daily. Replacing traditional products with organic products is one way in which an individual can lighten their “chemical load”. However, even products labeled “organic” can be misleading.

### The Organic Ordeal

If you do not see the USDA Certified Organic seal, the word “organic” doesn’t mean a thing.

Who can display the USDA seal, and what does it mean?

*100% organic:* Must contain only organically produced ingredients.

*Organic:* 95% of the ingredients must be organically grown, and the remaining ones must come from non-organic ingredients that have been approved. These products display the USDA organic logo and/or the certifier’s logo.



*Made With Organic Ingredients:* Must be made with at least 70% organic ingredients, three of which must be listed on the package. The remaining ingredients must be approved. These products cannot not display the USDA organic logo.

Without a doubt, the best way to read a personal care product ingredients listing is to read each product ingredient as if it were something that you might put in your mouth.