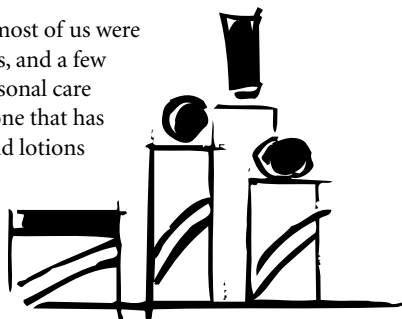


## Are Your Cleansers Really “Clean”?

Not long ago, the only beauty products available to most of us were ordinary soaps for our hair and bodies, toothpastes, and a few simple cosmetics. Today, in the United States alone, personal care products represent a \$20 billion a year industry—and one that has changed dramatically in recent decades. The potions and lotions lining our shelves have morphed into chemical powerhouses pumped with dyes, preservatives, detergents, and antimicrobials, to name just a few of the agents promising cleaner, brighter, and disease-free living.

Contrary to their billing, however, many of these products have damaging effects on our health, as well as to our water and wildlife. Some of these impacts can occur during use, particularly to young children or to those of us with more sensitive bodies. Other consequences are felt far away, occurring only after the products are flushed down the drain. And almost all of these products come with extensive packaging that is quickly discarded, contributing to mountains of plastic and paper waste.



### DID YOU KNOW...?

- \* Phthalates, chemicals commonly used in nail polishes and to fragrance personal care products, have been shown to cause birth defects in animals. Tests in the United States indicate that phthalates are being retained in human tissue at much higher levels than was previously believed.
- \* Toxic preservatives—including compounds that release formaldehyde, a probable carcinogen—are used to prolong the shelf lives of many personal care products. Dermatologists rank preservatives as the second most likely category of ingredients to cause skin reactions.
- \* Certain coloring agents and dyes used in cosmetics are common allergens and irri-

tants, while others contain lead acetate, a heavy metal that is toxic to the nervous system.

- \* Because our skin is permeable, chemicals applied to the outside of our bodies eventually make their way inside and are circulated by the bloodstream—one reason to be wary of the chemicals we put onto our skin.
- \* As many as two-thirds of all hand cleansers on U.S. store shelves are labeled “antibacterial,” designed to fight germs on contact. But scientists are increasingly concerned about the link between these products and the spread of drug-resistant “super-germs.”

### CHALLENGE YOURSELF AND OTHERS:

Spend an hour going through your home to identify any personal care products that may be hazardous to your health or your family’s health—particularly products containing a wide range of potential toxins. The next time you go shopping, try to replace these items with safer alternatives that are free of these compounds. If they aren’t available, encourage your retailer to carry them.

## SUCCESS STORIES

- ❖ Some manufacturers have started using organically grown botanical ingredients in their personal care products, a move that supports organic farmers who are drastically reducing the use of toxins on their farms.
- ❖ Some manufacturers have voluntarily stopped testing their products on laboratory animals, a process that subjects rabbits and other mammals to irritants and sometimes lethal doses of chemicals.
- ❖ Scientists are pressuring manufacturers to stop using antibacterial agents in their products, except in items targeted at hospitals and other facilities where the presence of germs can be life threatening.
- ❖ Responding to strong activist and consumer pressure, the European Parliament adopted a resolution in January 2003 that prohibits the use of certain phthalates in cosmetics.

## SIMPLE THINGS YOU CAN DO:

- ✓ Look for product labels that indicate the presence of organic ingredients, or that note that the product was not tested on animals. Avoid using products labeled “antibacterial.”
- ✓ Choose products with the smallest numbers of listed ingredients, avoiding entirely products that contain phthalates, detergents, and antimicrobial agents.
- ✓ Consider the size of an item’s packaging in relation to the size of the item. Opt for the paper-wrapped bar of soap, for instance, over a liquid cleanser packaged in a bottle that must be tossed out or recycled when the product is used up.
- ✓ Ask your favorite stores to stock organic lines of personal care products.
- ✓ Ask your local schools, workplace, and other institutions to think more critically about the cleansers and other products they buy. Large-scale purchasing can have large-scale benefits!
- ✓ If the labels on your favorite products aren’t clear about what’s in the products and how they are tested, contact the company and express your concerns.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

- 👉 **Environmental Working Group** (EWG) has launched a campaign to raise awareness about the hazards posed by phthalates in cosmetics, at [www.nottoopretty.org](http://www.nottoopretty.org).
- 👉 **OurStolenFuture.org** ([www.ourstolenfuture.org](http://www.ourstolenfuture.org)) is a source for a wide range of scientific research about the effects of endocrine disrupting chemicals, including phthalates, on humans and wildlife.
- 👉 **People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals** (PETA) ([www.peta.org](http://www.peta.org)) offers information about how animals are used for testing, alternatives to animal testing, and lists of companies and their testing policies.
- 👉 **The Alliance for the Prudent Use of Antibiotics** ([www.apua.org](http://www.apua.org)) provides information about the overuse of antibiotics and other antimicrobial agents, including in ordinary household products.