

Ingredients 101

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Myths of Dangerous Ingredients

ONE OF THE HOTTEST TOPICS in the beauty industry today is the concept of dangerous ingredients. Countless viral email messages circle the world claiming that certain ingredients cause disease and physical harm to the body. You've likely received the one that claims there is lead in lipsticks. (That isn't the case, by the way.) It's important to understand that ingredients in beauty products come from many sources and go through various methods of extraction until they reach the end product. Often times the individual ingredient receives bad press, when it is actually the processing process that creates the less desirable result.

Two of the most controversial ingredients are derived from the chemical family of sulfates, Sodium Lauryl Sulfate and Sodium Laureth Sulfate. These two ingredients commonly get confused. These are derived from lauryl alcohol which is isolated from coconut or palm kernel oil.

Sodium Lauryl Sulfate (SLS) is a harsh surfactant and a strong cleanser when used alone and/or in high concentrations. When it is used in shampoos and skincare cleansers it is blended with other milder surfactants and anti-irritants to reduce the activity of SLS.

The sister ingredient to Sodium Lauryl Sulfate is Sodium Laureth Sulfate (SLES) and is a little kinder to the skin. This is compatible with the structure and chemistry of hair and skin. This ingredient is much milder than SLS and less irritating. SLES undergoes more extensive processing during its manufacture so this makes it a milder cleanser. Both of these ingredients are deemed safe when they are in "wash off" products from the skin. The data supporting any of the claims of these ingredients being harmful are thought to be false by the major governing organizations.

Zinc Sulfate also has unstable rumors surrounding it. This ingredient is thought to be irritating to the skin and mucous membranes, and that it may even cause an allergic reaction in individuals. The first question to ask regarding

Zinc Sulfate, is how much of it is actually used in the formulation, and what is it blended with? Once Zinc Sulfate is blended, it loses the property of being an individual molecule; it takes on the new properties of a complex and develops a new personality.

One last ingredient that deserves a mention is Diethanolamine or DEA. It is found in many cosmetic products in the form of Cocamide DEA and Lauramide DEA. These are primarily used as cleansing agents, conditioners and foam boosters. The discussions centering on the harmful effects of this ingredient depend upon whether the DEA is free or bound. When the DEA becomes tightly bound to large lipid molecules it is non-reactive with any other substance. When the process of these raw materials is not controlled, some DEA can remain in the solution. In this free form DEA can react with nitrosating agents to produce nitrosamines, and it's these that are shown to be carcinogenic.

As you can see, the danger is often in the myth, not the ingredient. Health Canada has strict restrictions on cosmetic ingredients and monitors all products on store shelves. If any ingredient is proven to cause any kind of health problem, Health Canada quickly ensures that all products with that ingredient are removed from store shelves in this country immediately. In fact, Canada has some of the strictest ingredient requirements in the world. And that should make Canadians feel safe about the beauty products they buy. For more information about ingredient safety, visit Health Canada's website at www.hc-sc.gc.ca ©

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