



NAEM

National Association of
Environmental Medicine

PERSONAL CARE PRODUCTS: PATIENT HANDOUT

Personal care products (PCPs) represent the largest class of **avoidable** exposures to toxic ingredients. Unlike many of the toxicants in our air, water and food, we can control what we put on our skin. Fortunately, there are now more options for cleaner and safer products.

PCPs as a group are comprised of many ingredients that are classified as carcinogens (increases cancer risk), endocrine disruptors (ie., toxins that can promote diabetes and obesity), reproductive toxicants, allergens, and skin irritants. It is difficult to know which ingredients are harmful.

Toxins in personal care enter our body through our skin and lungs.

Americans assume incorrectly that PCPs have been tested or approved by the federal government. In fact, they are largely unregulated. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) does not even require basic safety testing of ingredients before they are used. In California, the Toxic-Free Cosmetic Act passed in September, 2020, but doesn't go into effect until 2025. This act prohibits the Toxic Twenty from being used in personal care products. The Toxic Twenty includes lead, mercury, some phthalates (which are never listed on the ingredient labels), some parabens, formaldehyde (never listed on the labels), and long chain per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS). Other states, including Maryland, New York, and Washington, have also banned certain ingredients in cosmetic products with a few differences.

FORTUNATELY, THERE IS GROWING AWARENESS OF THE HEALTH RISKS FROM COSMETICS, PERSONAL CARE AND HOUSEHOLD PRODUCTS - AND A GROWING LIST OF 'CLEAN' BEAUTY AND HOUSEHOLD PRODUCTS AVAILABLE TO USE.

TOXINS

Parabens

- Primarily used as a preservative in personal care products. Widely used in hair care, skin care, body wash, and facial care products. Also used in menstrual care and incontinence products.
- They are known endocrine (hormone) disrupting chemicals, and have the ability to cause cancer, specifically **breast, prostate and lung cancer, and impact fertility.**
- In 2014, Europe restricted some parabens and banned others. These are permitted in the US.
 - Restricted use: propylparaben, butylparaben
 - Banned: isopropylparaben, isobutylparaben, phenylparaben, benzylparaben, pentylparaben
- In California, the Toxic-Free Cosmetic Act goes into effect in 2025 and prohibits the following:
 - Prohibited in cosmetic products: isopropylparaben, isobutylparaben

Phthalates

- Primarily used in fragrance, nail polish, hairspray, and in plastics to make them more flexible. Widely used in skin care, body wash, hair care, and facial care products, **hidden in the ingredient list as "fragrance"**. Also found in menstrual care and incontinence products. Every plastic container is leaching phthalates into the product inside, even if there is no "fragrance".
- They are known endocrine (hormone) disrupting chemicals that bind to hormone receptors and promote diabetes, obesity, infertility, endometriosis, thyroid dysfunction and lowers testosterone.
- They promote cancer including breast and uterine.
- They are also linked to asthma, allergies, autism, eczema and ADHD.
- **These are never listed on the ingredient label - so you need to know where they hide!**
- In California, the Toxic-Free Cosmetic Act goes into effect in 2025 and prohibits the following:
 - Prohibited: dibutyl phthalate (DBP) and diethyl hexyl phthalate (DEHP)
 - These phthalates have been banned in Europe since 2004 due to risk to reproductive health.
 - Importantly, DEP, which is widely used in fragrances and perfumes is NOT restricted.

Formaldehyde Releasers & Formaldehyde

- Primarily found in nail polish, Brazilian blowouts and other hair straightening products.
- **Formaldehyde**, a known human carcinogen, **is never listed on the label (it can even be labeled "formaldehyde-free")**, so you need to be able to identify the chemicals that break down into formaldehyde that ARE required to be listed on the label. It is also linked to alopecia.
 - Formaldehyde Releasers (preservatives) to avoid: Quaternium-15, Dimethyl-dimethyl (DMDM), Hydantoin, Imidazolidinyl urea, Diazolidinyl urea, 2-bromo-2-nitropropane-1, 3-diol (bronopol), Sodium hydroxymethylglycinate
 - Formaldehyde ingredients to avoid: Formaldehyde resin (nail polish products), Methylene glycol (Brazilian blowout and other hair straightening products)
- In California, the Toxic-Free Cosmetic Act goes into effect in 2025 and prohibits the following:
 - Prohibited: formaldehyde, paraformaldehyde, methylene glycol, and quaternium-15
- Note, Formaldehyde **is also found in clothes that claim to be 'no iron', 'easy care' or 'wrinkle-free'**, and it is not required to be listed on the label.

1, 4 Dioxane (ethoxylated ingredients)

- Primarily found in toothpaste, laundry detergent, shower gels, body washes, shampoos, baby products and our water supply.
- 1, 4 dioxane is a solvent, and probable human carcinogen.
- It is linked with eczema, dermatitis, liver and kidney damage.
- **These are never listed on the ingredient label - so you need to know where they hide!**
- Look for these ingredients that are required to be listed on the label as they indicate ethoxylated ingredients are present:
 - **Sodium lauryl sulfate (SLS)**
 - Polyethylene, Polyethylene glycol (PEG), Polyoxyethylene, Polysorbate
 - Or any ingredient that ends with "xynol", "cetareth", or "oleth"

Triclosan and Triclocarban

- Both of these are environmentally persistent endocrine (hormone) disruptors, also linked to neurotoxicity (damaging your brain and nervous system), thyroid dysfunction and liver, prostate and colon cancer.
- In the US, triclosan and triclocarban were banned in antibacterial soaps in 2016, however it remains **in toothpaste, hand sanitizer, mouthwash, lotions, mud-masks, acne creams, deodorant**, and many other products.

TREATMENT = AVOIDANCE

While it may take some initial effort, you CAN reduce your exposure to these harmful chemicals by educating yourself on which products and chemicals to avoid. There are amazing apps and websites that help identify products of concern and provide safer, cleaner options. These non-toxic products may be more expensive, but it is worth the investment in your long-term health.

ARTIFICIAL FRAGRANCE = #1 SOURCE OF PHTHALATES (DEP)!

An important and relatively easy change is to STOP using any product with fragrance! Fragrance will show up on the label as fragrance or parfum - it will NOT say phthalates.

- AVOID or REPLACE all personal care and household cleaning products with fragrance - unless they are certified 'phthalate-free'
- AVOID all dryer sheets, laundry fragrance booster beads, plug-in and spray air fresheners, and most candles.
- Note: the plug in air fresheners contain formaldehyde and benzene, along with phthalates.

MENSTRUAL & INCONTINENCE PRODUCTS ARE MAJOR SOURCE OF TOXINS

These products are a significant source of phthalates, volatile organic compounds, parabens, environmental phenols, fragrance chemicals, dioxins and dioxin-like compounds. Studies clearly show these chemicals are readily absorbed via vaginal and vulvar tissue, which is highly permeable and these chemicals are absorbed without undergoing first-pass metabolism. **From menarche until menopause, the average menstruator will use over 11,000 tampons or sanitary pads.** Men using incontinence products are also vulnerable to rapid absorption of these toxins.

NAEM Recommendations

- Look for certifications that provide confidence the formula is 'clean'



- Use apps on your phone to look up products while you shop
 - Think Dirty App - scan products and spot dirty ingredients

- [EWG Verified App](#) - verified free from chemicals of concern
- [On Skin App](#) - skincare ingredient barcode scanner
- [Clearya App](#) - provides alerts on toxic ingredients

☐ Learn more at these websites and sign up for their newsletters to stay up to date

- [Made Safe](#) - certified products that are safe and sustainable
- [Environmental Working Group](#) - an education and advocacy non-profit
 - [EWG Skin Deep](#) - interactive guide to safer personal care products
 - [EWG Sunscreen](#) - interactive guide to safer sunscreen products
- [Clean Label Project](#) - product testing and certification of no harmful ingredients
- [Women's Voices for the Earth](#) - Research and reports on toxins in menstrual products, cosmetics, cleaning products, and salon products.
- [Campaign for Safe Cosmetics](#) - an education and advocacy non-profit

NAEM SUMMARY OF PRODUCTS TO AVOID/REPLACE

Use the apps and websites above to find safer, cleaner options.

PERSONAL CARE	COSMETICS	OTHER
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Skin Care ● Facial Care ● Hair Care ● Hair Color ● Hair Spray ● Hair Straighteners ● Brazilian Blowouts ● Sunscreen 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Blushes, powders, eye shadows ● Eye and lip liners ● Nail Polish ● Skin Lighteners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Menstrual products ● Incontinence products ● Dryer Sheets & Washer fragrance booster beads ● Air Fresheners: sprays & plug-ins ● Laundry Detergent ● Household cleaners
CHEMICALS OF CONCERN		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Parabens ● Phthalates (Fragrances) ● Formaldehyde Releasers (hairspray, straighteners, Brazilian Blowouts) ● 1, 4 Dioxane (shampoo, body wash, shower gels) ● Solvents/VOCs (hair color, straighteners) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Parabens ● Phthalates (fragrances, nail polish) ● Formaldehyde releasers (nail polish, lighteners, color cosmetics) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Phthalates (fragrances, air fresheners, dryer sheets, laundry booster fragrance beads) ● Formaldehyde Releasers (plug in air fresheners) ● 1, 4 Dioxane (laundry detergent) ● Solvents/VOCs (menstrual, incontinence products, HH cleaners)

Reference [Campaign for Safe Cosmetics](#).