**Bathroom Cabinet Challenge**

Check your personal care products for the harsh chemicals listed below. If any of them are listed in the ingredients, you may want to consider swapping that product out for a healthier option.

Going forward, the only way to be sure of what’s in your personal care products is to become familiar with which ingredients to avoid, and then check the labels of every product before you buy it. Here are some of the major ones that you will definitely want to avoid:

[**Artificial fragrances**](https://articles.mercola.com/sites/articles/archive/2007/03/01/one-out-of-five-cosmetics-may-be-contaminated-with-cancer-causing-impurity.aspx)**:** Can contain hormone disruptors and are among the top 5 allergens in the world, and can cause asthma and trigger asthma attacks. It may help sell products from face cream to laundry detergent, but do you know what’s in it? Fragrances are in everything from shampoo to deodorant to lotion. Federal law doesn’t require companies to list on product labels any of the chemicals in their fragrance mixture. Recent research from EWG and the Campaign for Safe Cosmetics found an average of 14 chemicals in 17 name brand fragrance products, none of them listed on the label. Our advice? Buy fragrance free wherever possible.

**BHA:** The National Toxicology Program classifies butylated hydroxyanisole (BHA) as “reasonably anticipated to be a human carcinogen.” It can cause skin depigmentation. In animal studies, BHA produces liver damage and causes stomach cancers such as papillomas and carcinomas and interferes with normal reproductive system development and thyroid hormone levels. The European Union considers it unsafe in fragrance. It is found in food, food packaging, and personal care products sold in the U.S.

**Boric acid and Sodium borate:** These chemicals disrupt hormones and harm the male reproductive system. Men working in boric acid-producing factories have a greater risk of decreased sperm count and libido. In animals, high doses cause testicular damage to mice, rats, and dogs. Both the European Union and Canada restrict these ingredients in body care products made for children under three years of age and require that products containing these ingredients be labeled as not appropriate for broken or damaged skin. No similar safety standards are in place in the United States. The cosmetic industry’s own safety panel states that these chemicals are unsafe for infant or damaged skin, because they can absorb readily into the body. Despite this guidance, boric acid is found in some diaper creams.

**Coal tar hair dyes and other coal tar ingredients (including Aminophenol, Diaminobenzene, Phenylenediamine):** Coal tar, a byproduct of coal processing, is a known human carcinogen, according to the National Toxicology Program and the International Agency for Research on Cancer. Hair stylists and other professionals are exposed to these chemicals in hair dye almost daily. Europe has banned many of these ingredients in hair dyes. While FDA sanctions coal tar in specialty products such as dandruff and psoriasis shampoos, the long-term safety of these products has not been demonstrated.

**Formaldehyde:** A potent preservative considered a known human carcinogen by the International Agency on Research on Cancer. Formaldehyde, also an asthmagen, neurotoxicant and developmental toxicant, was once mixed into too many personal care products as antiseptic. This use has declined. But some hair straighteners are based on formaldehyde’s hair-stiffening action and release substantial amounts of the chemical.

**Formaldehyde releasers – Bronopol, DMDM hydantoin, Diazolidinyl urea, Imidzaolidinyl urea and Quaternium-15:** Cosmetics preservatives that slow form formaldehyde to kill bacteria growing in products. Formaldehyde is a known human carcinogen. The preservatives and the formaldehyde they generate can trigger allergic skin reactions. Formaldehyde releasers are widely used in US products. Not surprisingly, more Americans develop contact allergies to these ingredients than Europeans.

**Hydroquinone:** A skin bleaching chemical that can cause a skin disease called ochronosis, with blue-black lesions that in the worst cases become permanent black caviar-size bumps. In animal studies, hydroquinone has caused tumor development.

**Lead:** A neurotoxin in popular hair dye Grecian Formula 16 and other black hair dyes for men. Lead from hair dyes travels from hair to doorknobs, cabinets and other household items, where children can ingest it.

**Methylisothiazolinone (MIT), methylchloroisothiazolinone and benzisothiazolinone:** MIT is a chemical preservative used in shampoo to prevent bacteria from developing, which may have detrimental effects on your nervous system. These chemicals are commonly used together in personal care products, among the most common irritants, sensitizers and causes of contact allergy. Lab studies on mammalian brain cells suggest that methylisothiazolinone may be neurotoxic.

**Mineral Oil, Paraffin:** These products coat your skin like plastic, clogging pores and creating a build-up of toxins. They also slow cellular development, which can cause you to show earlier signs of aging and are a suspected cause of cancer and disruption to hormonal activity.

**Musks:** Used as fragrances, can accumulate in your body, and have been linked to skin irritation, hormone disruption, and cancer in laboratory studies.

**Nanoparticles:** Zinc oxide and titanium dioxide nanoparticles appear to be among the safer and more effective active ingredients in U.S.-marketed sunscreen creams because they do not penetrate the skin. But avoid sprays and powders containing these nanoparticles, which could penetrate your lungs and enter your bloodstream. Many other nanoparticles have received very little testing, yet they readily penetrate the skin and contaminate the body. Cosmetics manufacturers are not required to disclose the presence of nanoparticles in products.

**Oxybenzone:** Sunscreen agent and ultraviolet light absorber, found in the bodies of nearly all Americans, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. In human epidemiological studies, oxybenzone has been linked to irritation, sensitization and allergies. A study of 404 New York City women in the third trimester of pregnancy associated higher maternal concentration of oxybenzone with a decreased birth weight among newborn baby girls but with greater birth weight in newborn boys. Studies on cells and laboratory animals indicate that oxybenzone and its metabolites may disrupt the hormone system.

**Parabens (specifically Propyl-, Isopropyl-, Butyl-, and Isobutyl- parabens):** a chemical preservative found in underarm deodorants and other cosmetics that has been shown to mimic the action of the female hormone estrogen, which can drive the growth of human breast tumors. The CDC has detected parabens in virtually all Americans bodies. According to the European Commission’s Scientific Committee on Consumer Products, longer chain parabens like propyl and butyl paraben and their branched counterparts, isopropyl and isobutylparabens, may disrupt the endocrine system and cause reproductive and developmental disorders.

**PEGs/Ceteareth/Polyethylene compounds:** A family of conditioning and cleaning agents that go by many names. These synthetic chemicals are frequently contaminated with 1,4-dioxane, which the U.S. government considers it a probable human carcinogen and which readily penetrates the skin. Cosmetics makers could easily remove 1,4-dioxane from ingredients, but tests documenting its common presence in products show that they often don’t.

**Petroleum distillates:** Petroleum-extracted cosmetics ingredients, commonly found in mascara. They may cause contact dermatitis and are often contaminated with cancer-causing impurities. They are produced in oil refineries at the same time as automobile fuel, heating oil and chemical feedstocks.

**Phthalates:** Plasticizing ingredients (present in nearly three-quarters of 72 products tested by the Environmental Working Group), which have been linked to birth defects in the reproductive system of boys and lower sperm-motility in adult men, among other problems. A growing number of studies indicate that chemical family damages the male reproductive system. Pregnant women should avoid nail polish containing dibutyl phathalate. Everyone should avoid products with “fragrance” indicating a chemical mixture that may contain phthalates.

**Resorcinol:** Common ingredient in hair color and bleaching products; skin irritant, toxic to the immune system and frequent cause of hair dye allergy. In animal studies, resorcinol can disrupt normal thyroid function. The federal government regulates exposures to resorcinol in the workplace, but its use is not restricted in personal care products.

**Toluene:** Made from petroleum or coal tar and found in most synthetic fragrances. It is a volatile petrochemical solvent and paint thinner and potent neurotoxicant that acts as an irritant, impairs breathing and causes nausea. Chronic exposure linked to anemia, lowered blood cell count, liver or kidney damage, and may affect a developing fetus. In human epidemiological and animal studies, toluene has been associated with toxicity to the immune system. Some evidence suggests a link to malignant lymphoma.

**Triclosan & Triclocarban:** Antimicrobial pesticides in liquid soap (triclosan) or soap bars (triclocarban), very toxic to the aquatic environment. Often found as contaminants in people due to widespread use of antimicrobial cleaning products. Triclosan disrupts thyroid function and reproductive hormones. American Medical Association and the American Academy of Microbiology say that soap and water serve just as well to prevent spread of infections and reduce bacteria on the skin. Overuse may promote the development of bacterial resistance.

**Vitamin A compounds (retinyl palmitate, retinyl acetate, retinol):** Vitamin A is an essential nutrient but not necessarily safe for use on skin. Studies show that when applied to sun-exposed skin these compounds can increase skin sensitivity. Furthermore sunlight breaks down vitamin A to produce toxic free radicals that can damage DNA and hasten skin lesions and tumors in lab animals. These ingredients are widely used in sunscreens, skin lotions, lip products and makeup. EWG urges consumers to avoid leave on skin and lip products with vitamin A.

This is only a sampling of the toxic ingredients that are out there. If you are wondering whether your favorite personal care products are safe, the [**Environmental Working Group’s Skin Deep Cosmetic Safety Database**](http://www.cosmeticsdatabase.com/index.php?nothanks=1) allows you to look up a product and find out. **Or Better Yet, Use Only Products With Ingredients That You Can Read and Pronounce**

Resources:

<https://www.ewg.org/skindeep/top-tips-for-safer-products/>

https://articles.mercola.com/sites/articles/archive/2008/04/05/carcinogens-found-in-quot-organic-quot-personal-care-products.aspx