

READ THE LABEL - Ecologist bodycare challenge

Why choose between looking good and being healthy? Every month Pat Thomas examines the ingredients in personal care products and shows us which chemicals to avoid and what the alternatives are...

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If you use modern cosmetics and bodycare products, then you are exposing yourself to harmful chemicals. On average we each use 9 different products, with over 120 unique ingredients, daily; 90 per cent of these have never been fully evaluated for safety. Your skin can't protect you from these. Individually and in combination most can quickly and easily penetrate the skin and be absorbed into your body where they are linked to a range of problems including cancer, birth defects and central nervous system damage. This is not acceptable.

We challenge the cosmetics industry to make products with:

- No potential carcinogens, neurotoxins and reproductive toxins
- No petrochemicals
- No synthetic perfumes
- No synthetic colours
- Ingredients with full safety data
- Ingredient label on the product
- Internationally standardised ingredient names
- Packaging that minimises the need for preservatives
- Organic ingredients

What we can do as consumers

- Read and learn to understand the label
- Buy fewer products
- Use less of what we do buy
- Dilute
- Ignore label hype (eg 'scientifically proven', 'visible results in seven days')
- Make our own
- Report adverse effects to manufacturers
- Challenge stockists to sell safer products