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Daily Telegraph

Cosmetics could be killing you

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THE average woman absorbs two kilograms of chemicals from cosmetics every year - from cancer-causing compounds in face cream to arsenic in eyeshadow.

A typical woman's daily beauty regime may involve applying as many as 175 chemical compounds to their skin and hair.

Of course, the manufacturers would say these chemicals and resulting products are safe, but a growing school of thought begs to differ.

Cosmetics contain many different kinds of chemicals, but of particular concern are a group of preservatives called parabens, which by some estimates are found in 99 per cent of all 'leave on' cosmetics, and 77 per cent of 'rinse off' cosmetics.

These are known hormone disruptors: evidence suggests they can mimic the female hormone oestrogen, and a lifetime of increased exposure to oestrogen is linked to a heightened risk of breast cancer.

One study found parabens present in 18 out of 20 breast cancer tissue samples (though it is important to note that the study did not prove they'd actually caused the breast cancer).

Parabens are also thought to adversely affect male reproductive functions.

Another troubling chemical is the antibacterial agent and pesticide triclosan, which is used in toothpastes, soaps, household cleaning products and body washes.

It belongs to the chlorophenol class of chemicals, which are suspected of causing cancer in humans and taken internally, even in small amounts, can cause cold sweats, circulatory problems and - in extreme cases - coma.

Also of concern are phthalates, a substance that gives our lotions that silky, creamy, texture, but which are also a 'plasticiser' used to make plastics flexible.

Certain phthalates are known carcinogens, and studies have suggested they damage the liver, kidneys, lungs and the reproductive system, as well as affecting the development of unborn baby boys.

The list goes on. Sodium laureth sulphate, a frequent ingredient in shower gels and shampoos, is a skin irritant; Propylene glycol, found in soap, blushers and make-up remover, has been shown in large quantities to depress the central nervous system to make it function less effectively, and aluminum in deodorants is linked to breast cancer by medical research.

And did you know that certain eye shadows contain arsenic?

One thing is for sure: few of us would want to rub any of these chemicals into our eyes, far less ingest them in liquids by drinking them.

Yet, every day, we rub them into our skin, and allow them to enter our bodies.

Given the facts, it's hardly surprising that a growing number of experts believe these substances have a cumulative effect on our bodies.

They think the 'chemical cocktail' inside us is contributing to the increased frequency of a host of illnesses ranging from eczema to cancers as well as developmental problems such as autism and dyslexia.

"It's difficult to see the link between chemicals in cosmetics and damage to health unless you stand back and look at the wider picture," Dr Paula Baillie-Hamilton, author of *Toxic Overload*, told *The Daily Mail*.

"Man-made chemicals first emerged 100 years ago, and every decade since, the overall production of these synthetic chemicals has doubled.

"We are surrounded by chemicals: in the air, in our food, in our water and especially in our cosmetics, and the fact is that our bodies can't break many of these substances down."

Dr Baillie-Hamilton also thinks that absorbing chemicals through our skin is more dangerous than swallowing them.

"At least if you ingest chemicals through your mouth, your digestive system can do something towards dealing with them," she says.

"If they go through your skin they hit your blood stream immediately and are then transported to vital organs such as kidney and liver, where they may be stored for many years."

For instance, the average woman eats, albeit unwittingly, five lipsticks a year, which in her lifetime is the equivalent volume of 1.5 blocks of lard.

People who use permanent hair dye are more than twice as likely to develop bladder cancer as those that don't.

Both ammonia and paraphenylenediamine (PPD) - chemical substances used in dyes - can cause allergic reactions, too.

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