



Hair and Skin Care: What is the scoop on ingredients?

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We want to present our best selves. Look good, feel good, be good! Don't you love when you're walking down the street, into your office or the local happy hour and you know your hair is looking shiny, no frizz, and styled! Likewise, when our skin is glowing, we are more smiley and therefore exude a positive energy into the universe. I know I do!

Most of us might think of hair and skin as primarily in the aesthetic category of life, but really skin and hair are the human body's first line of defense against infections and outside invaders. Signs of stress, age and general unhealthiness will likely appear first in hair and skin. So appearance is not only a outside beauty thing, but an inside the body thing.

Wrinkles, dryness, dark circles, itchy and saggy skin or dandruff (to list a few) may indicate dehydration, fatigue, or other disorders. Likewise, thinning hair and color changes as well as the texture of our strands can be a warning sign. The best defense is a good offense. This means self-awareness. Know your body and the normalness of it. If something seems out of the ordinary then take action and see your dermatologist or doctor. The outside may be telling us something about the inside.

Making a positive first impression personally and professionally is the social norm and therefore a daily goal. This is evident in the statistics of beauty and personal care consumer spending which is in the tens of billions and demand is growing, not only with women but with men as well. We, and by "we" I mean all of us humans, are looking for products that have an emphasis on gorgeous, anti-aging and for ingredients to be effective and safe (think properly tested, organic, clean and/or plant-based).

Although there is evidence that some synthetic chemicals used in personal care products can cause health problems, many dermatologists warn that "natural" and "organic" labeling may be misleading. These conflicting reports make it difficult to navigate our wants and needs in beauty

and personal care products. By no means does it mean a toxic ingredient is good, it also doesn't mean that just because something is called "plant-based", or "organic" it is better.

So how can we make choices? The answer is subjective. Sorry, but that is the way it is. It might be helpful to learn about what a friend or colleague may use, but that doesn't mean it is right for you. Some ingredients may be fantastic for some, rash inducing for others. It is a game of trial and error. As someone with sensitive skin that is prone to flaky spots and acne breakouts when I use the wrong products, I can attest to the fact that finding the right mix is a process. No joke, a process!

What can you do? Be in tune with your skin and hair and notice the aesthetic results from the products you use. For example, if something creates frizz, dryness, or makes your hair limp note the ingredients and in your next choice try to avoid those. This means reading labels. Ugh! Really? Yes, we have to do that with food and beauty products!

The American Academy of Dermatologists has identified over 15,000 ingredients that may cause irritation and unfortunately it varies from person to person. A simple step to help you solve this dilemma is to do a patch test. It works like this:

First begin by making sure the area you will test on is clean of any products. Also, choose an area that you're not likely to wash too soon and one that may not be obvious to the world in case a product does cause irritation.

For skin care cleaners which wash off - use a quarter size amount on your forearm, inside the elbow or under the jaw. Leave it on for at least 5 minutes, and do this for about a week before incorporating a new product into your regimen.

For leave-on lotions, serums or hair products that will absorb into the dermis and hair follicles put the same amount of product you are likely to use behind the ear, nape of your neck or inside your elbow and won't wash too soon. Watch for any signs of a rash or reaction over the next day or so. Again, this should not be a one time thing, try to do this for at least a week.

If you experience a reaction, wash the area immediately and use a cool compress to calm the inflammation. Other anti-inflammatory topical options are colloidal oatmeal, aloe-vera (100% aloe with no alcohol) or witch hazel water. Continued irritation that does not subside will require the eye of a trained physician.

Stay tuned for more beauty tips and tricks!