

Naturally beautiful

Health-conscious consumers make the switch to chemical-free personal care products

by Christie Judson

You are what you eat." Popularized more than 70 years ago by nutritionist-author Victor Lindlahr, it is a commonsensical phrase that, today, is espoused by nearly every mother and health-conscious consumer in North America.

In fact, many of us have become steadfast label readers, rejecting acronym-laden ingredient lists overflowing with preservatives and scientific words we cannot pronounce.

However, while we have become highly

aware of the controversies surrounding the use of chemicals in our food, we are only now beginning to question the long-term effects of such ingredients in our cosmetics and personal care products.

Not surprisingly, recent research indicates up to 60 per cent of the chemicals in topically applied products – such as makeup, shampoo, body lotions, face creams, perfume, hair dyes and deodorant – are absorbed through our skin and deposited into our bloodstream.

Lana Mitchell, skin-care specialist at Pure Pharmacy Health Centre in South Surrey, says that because of this, she wants to see more information made available to the public about the various chemical ingredients found in popular, top-brand beauty products, toiletries and detergents.

"It floors me knowing what I know now," says Mitchell, who has been working in the cosmetology industry for 23 years. "It wasn't until I really started doing my own research that I knew any of this. How would the average consumer know when many of the professionals don't know themselves?"

Mitchell says unregulated claims on

cosmetics and body care products, such as "natural," "eco-friendly" and "non-toxic," can be misleading and make consumers feel they are making a healthier choice when, she notes, they are not.

"Conventional cosmetic manufacturers often promote their product as having natural ingredients, but it may also contain a dozen or more harmful chemical and synthetic ingredients."

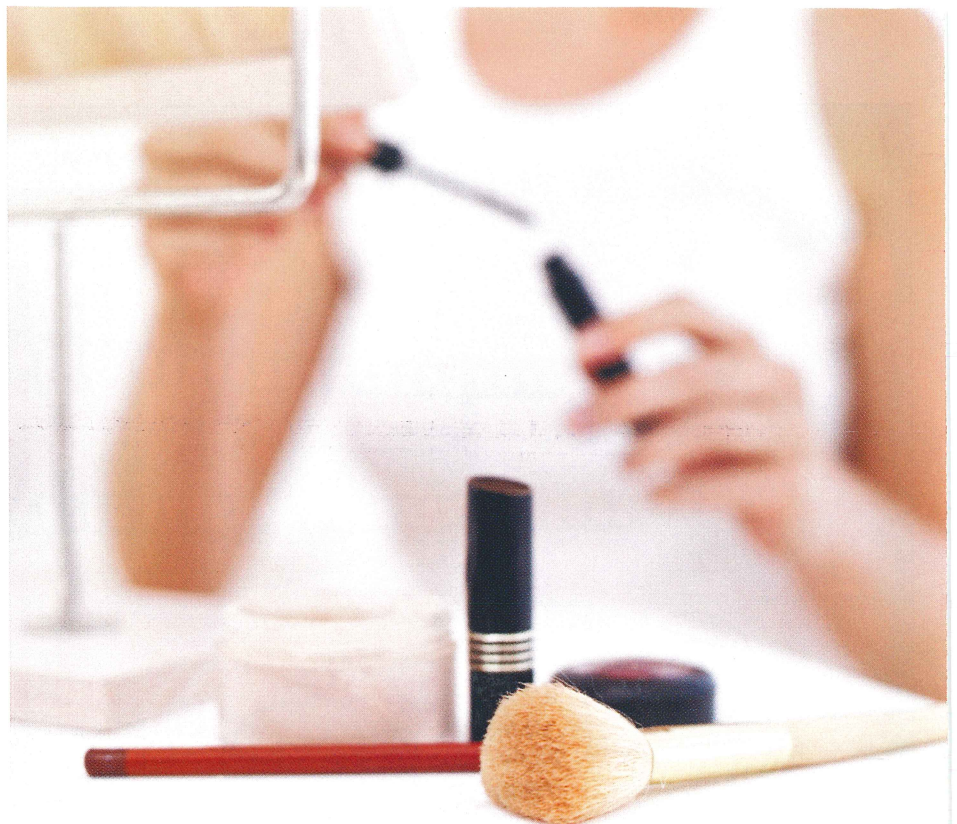
"You have to be open to trying something new"

While many commonly used ingredients have come into question in the last few years, Mitchell is particularly wary of the chemicals tagged the "Dirty Thirty"

by Teens Turning Green, a youth movement working to eliminate toxic exposures.

Included in the list are Cocamide/Lauramide DEA and Triethanolamine (TEA). Widely used in shampoos, soaps and moisturizers, both can potentially form carcinogenic compounds called nitrosamines, which are said to be among the most potent cancer-causing agents found.

Because of its ability to enable other chemicals to penetrate deeper into the skin, sodium/ammonium lauryl sulfate is also on the list, as are parabens, which are synthetic preservatives that have been linked to breast



Body repair line by Alpin Derm



continued

cancer and identified as possible endocrine disruptors that can affect the body's normal hormonal balance.

Mitchell is excited to note, however, chemical-free lines from companies like Keys and Suki are starting to get a lot of attention from Hollywood, which she hopes will help increase education and awareness about these and other natural cosmetic alternatives.

However, she warns that people should expect to go through a short "adjustment period" when switching from conventional to natural products.

"You have to be open to trying something new," she says. "Natural skin care products feel, smell and sometimes perform differently, but you'll learn to love them."

She also points out it is important to be aware that there are varying degrees of purity even among "natural" products. However, she says switching to a product that has one "not-so-great thing" from one that has "12 not-so-great things" is a good trade-off.

One of Mitchell's favourite "extreme," brands is Bioéthique. It offers 100 per cent natural, third-party certified organic face, body and hair care, which she says is a great, chemical-free alternative. She also recommends Alpin Derm, an herb-based skin-care line from Austria, as well Convention Cosmetics - "a fabulous switch" for people used to high-end brand-name beauty products.

"Extreme to beginner natural - there is something out there for everyone."

For information and safety ratings from Environmental Working Group on popular products, visit www.cosmeticsdatabase.com

Organic skin-care line by Suki



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