

AGELESS

Conscious Living Lifestyle

MAY/JUNE 2009

DESTINATION

Blue Ice

PURE BEAUTY

the Age Statement

FOOD MATTERS

*Thinking globally
eating locally*

TOTAL WELLNESS

*Real Age
Vs 'Realage'*

REAL LIFE

Inspired Life

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Are synthetics and chemicals harmful to my health? The debate on what is and is not beneficial for our skin has been raging for far too long with no end in sight. Good products vs. bad products. How can you tell when billions of dollars are spent on blurring the line?

Concentration of Active Ingredients

Is organic the way to go? The answer depends on the product's overall formulation and concentration of the operative ingredients. When buying natural or organic skin care products, look for extracts, essential oils, enzymes, liposomes, and acids. Botanical ingredients in these forms are 'active' in that they have the ability to penetrate the skin well enough to be effective. See where they appear on the product's list of ingredients. If close to the bottom, their concentration is more than likely too low to do any good. The quality of the other ingredients is just as important. Even the most potent actives are useless when blended with a slew of irritants and pore clogging ingredients.

Keep in mind also that, without preservatives, most botanical actives begin to lose their potency after six months. If your skin care is truly organic, it will have a 'used by' or expiration date and may require refrigeration. Very few products are preservative-free, for the simple reason that it is not economically viable. All commercial (over-the-counter) skin care products are, by law, required to use preservatives. Good idea, considering that most products are made to last up to seven years on the shelf. Preservatives are not the enemy. Used in low concentration (<1%) they keep products safe to use and free from mould, fungi and bacteria. Again, it's the number that matters!

What about chemical or synthetic ingredients? Botanicals are superior in their complexity. But man-made chemicals/synthetics are often more stable and consistent in quality than their natural counterparts. New research and technology are bringing safe and highly effective ingredients, both synthetic and natural, into the market. It is foolish to dismiss them just because they are "chemicals". We are surrounded by chemicals, made of chemicals, and ingest and breathe chemicals. We cannot escape them. A more relevant question to ask is "what are the benefits and specific functions of a particular ingredient and how does it work"?

To keep costs low and margins high, most commercially sold products contain very low concentrations of active ingredients (botanical or synthetic) that they are ineffectual and ... harmless. And there is the rub.

Many skin care products are neither good nor bad. They are simply ineffective. And the never-ending debate is for naught, literally. There is a higher concentration of harmful chemicals and toxins in the air we breathe and the food we eat, than in most skin care products. Likewise, if you want to go "organic", load up on fruits and vegetables at your nearest farmer's market, but don't expect your off-the-shelf shampoo to be wholesome.

Customer Demand: The Most Important Number of All

Global skin care sales will exceed 164 billion dollars by 2010. The promise of beauty and perpetual youth makes die-hard optimists of us all. We have no one but our own credulity to blame for the onslaught of exaggerated claims. As long as we happily part with our hard-earned money for a piece of the fantasy, the largely self-regulated skin care industry will continue to flood the market with worthless products.

The FDA and EU make good attempt to keep an eye on the industry, but inundated with life-threatening matters such as illegal sales of counterfeit drugs, contaminated food, and bioterrorism – just to name a few – the regulation of cosmetics and skin care has always been a low priority.

This does not mean no one is watching the pot. The Personal Care Product Council (formerly known as The Cosmetic, Toiletry, and Fragrance Association or CTFA, www.personalcarecouncil.org) has established its own safety assessment system: the Cosmetic Ingredient Review (CIR, <http://www.cir-safety.org/info.shtml>). Visit both websites for valuable information and interesting figures, but keep in mind that powerful members of the industry fund both organizations.



Stop the Madness, use Common Sense

There is no reason to believe that skin care companies are out to harm us. It makes no business sense. Instead, the quality and integrity of the skin care products available today are largely dictated by consumers' demand. The only trouble is that we are asking for miracles. And so, we get products that promise improbable results and ingredients that claim to work wonders. If, instead of unrealistic expectations, we continue to educate ourselves and buy only high quality products that truly deliver, the industry will soon oblige.

So, should you worry about the safety of your skin care products? If you smoke or are addicted to soft drinks, you would be better off getting rid of those nasty habits before throwing out your store-bought body lotion or face cream. But, if you are serious about your overall health and well-being, and want result from your skin care, then learn more about your skin care ingredients. Ignore the senseless claims and confusing arguments. Look for product companies that share your values, and ask them to show you the numbers.



Full disclosure

Skin care by the numbers – an insider's guide.

By Adria Lake

Real Cost

Profit is good. Huge profit? Even better. Too much profit? No such thing. Most "premium" or brand name skin care products are priced at 50 to 100 times their actual cost. This translates to paying \$50-100 for \$1 worth of product. In some cases, the spread could be as high as 500 to 1000 times.

What do you get for less than a dollar? High quality ingredients do not come cheap. A dollar buys you second-rate fillers, binders, emulsions and plenty of synthetics. Not all chemicals and synthetics are bad for you (more on this later). But, as a rule, they are cheaper than botanical based ingredients. Where does the rest of your money go? Some goes into research and development. But a big chunk is spent on marketing and advertising. TV promos, glossy ads, expensive packaging.

Smaller reputable brands may spend more on their products, but if they 'outsource' their production to a larger manufacturer and packaging company (as most do), similar numbers will be at play.

Pure and high performance products are costly to produce. A product manufacturer must forgo their sky-high profit margins, cut out the hype, and produce in small batches as botanical ingredients are expensive and have short shelf life. Not exactly the most enthralling business strategy, but you can find product companies that are taking this road less travelled.