

Hazards in the Home

Body Care - Bathroom

The modern bathroom resembles a chemists shop - overflowing with lotions and potions. The big companies make more and more exotic concoctions to keep us buying their products which contain cocktails of chemicals. Most are not needed and there are safer, cheaper alternatives anyway. Toothpaste is a worrying example. The list of chemicals in most toothpastes would frighten Dr Frankenstein. And we put this in our mouths!!!

Here are just a few nasty ingredients to look for:

- **Shampoos and conditioners** can contain cresol, formaldehyde, glycols, nitrates/nitrosamines and sulphur compounds.¹ As well as sodium lauryl sulphate. (see below)
- **Head lice shampoos** only work for a short while before the insects build up a resistance. They contain pesticides, so they are harmful to us. The worst



contain possible carcinogenic and endocrine disrupting pesticides such as: carbaryl, malathion, permethrin and phenothrin.²

- **Hairsprays** often contain toxic resins and propellant gases. Finely dispersed in an aerosol, they can cause a lung disease called thesaurosis. They don't do much for your skin or eyes either.³
- **Toothpaste** may contain fluoride (until the 1930's considered a poison⁴), triclosan (which has a similar chemical structure to dioxins⁴). Other added chemicals and artificial flavours, sweeteners and colourings are potentially hazardous.⁵
- **Sodium lauryl sulphate**, an industrial-strength detergent, is not only added to toothpaste, but also to shampoos, conditioners and anything else that the manufacturers think needs a nice foam. It can cause all manner of allergic reactions including hair loss,⁶ is suspected of causing gastro-intestinal and liver problems and it has also been associated with mouth ulcers.⁴

Other chemicals in this class are: sodium cetyl sulphate and sodium laureth sulphate.⁶

Alternatives

Shampoos

If you have a dandruff problem, the first things to look at are your general health and stress level. Regular scalp massage can help, but a healthy diet is the best remedy.

Many people don't use shampoo, others use mild washing up liquid, soap or soap flakes.

Head lice

Experts agree that the most, perhaps the only, completely reliable method of removal is thorough combing.³ For more info contact: The Pesticides Trust (see cover) or send for a Bug Busting Kit (£4.50) from Community Hygiene Concern, 160 Inderwick Road, London N8 9JT (0181 341 7167) Locally you can contact your Health Visitor/School Nurse.

Toothpastes

All toothpastes list the active ingredients, so amounts of triclosan and fluoride salts present in the paste should always be found on the packet.⁴

6% of the adult population don't use toothpaste at all. It used to come tinned as a powder - normally bicarbonate of soda (baking powder) - into which you dipped your toothbrush to make a paste. Bicarbonate of soda has suddenly been rediscovered by large producers, many of whom now promote toothpaste with this in as something new.

However they also still contain some of the usual dodgy chemicals.

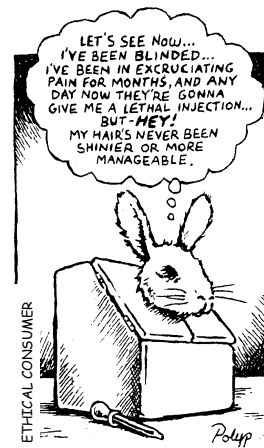
You can make your own safe toothpaste from bicarb with a drop of peppermint oil.

Soap

Pure soaps are unlikely to contain artificial colourings or perfumes, and are made from vegetable-based ingredients. Obtainable from health food shops.

Sources of Information

1. Gary A Davis & Em Turner *Safe Substitutes at Home: Non-toxic household Products*, EnviroSense, <http://es.epa.gov/techinfo/facts/safe-fs>
2. The Pesticide Action Network UK. www.pan-uk.org
3. Karen Christensen(2000) *Eco Living - A Handbook for the 21st Century*, Piatkus, London
4. Ethical Consumer Magazine (issue 69). www.ethicalconsumer.org
5. Mark Sydenham (1996) *Green Home Handbook*, Friends of the Earth Scotland
6. Valerie Ann Worwood (1991) *The Fragrant Pharmacy*, Bantam Books, London



Animal testing of shampoos is banned in this country, but the ingredients may still be tested on animals, and many products are still tested outside the UK.⁴