

THE KEEP-OFF-YOUR-BOD LIST

Ingredient	What It Is	Why It's Harmful
*Parabens, most common forms: methylparaben and propylparaben	Chemical compounds used as a preservative in everything from shampoos to lotions.	Linked to breast cancer, skin cancer, and reproductive issues.
*Phthalates⁹	Usually hidden under the catch-all term “fragrance” on ingredient labels, they’re in everything from conditioner to cosmetics. Toxins more often give the desired alluring smell of many products rather than, say, tuberose petals.	Linked to reproductive issues and early puberty. Experts worry that their endocrine-disrupting effects might play a role in breast cancer. Fragrances also can cause allergies and dermatitis.
Aluminum¹⁰	The active ingredient in many sweat-stoppers.	It’s a bioaccumulative neurotoxin that collects in fat cells and destroys nerve tissues; also linked to Alzheimer’s.
*Triclosan¹¹	Antibacterial ingredient found in hand sanitizers and liquid soaps. Classified by the government as a pesticide.	Endocrine disruptor specifically shown to interfere with the thyroid. Also helps cause bacterial resistance to broad-spectrum antibiotics.
Formaldehyde¹²—may also appear as DMDM hydantoin, imidazolidinyl urea, diazolidinyl urea, quaternium-15, bronopol, 5-bromo-5-nitro-1,3-dioxane, or hydroxymethylglycinate	Smelly stuff from anatomy class found in foundation, soap, nail polish, hair-straightening treatments, and other products.	Classified by the International Agency for Research on Cancer and other agencies as a known human carcinogen.
1,4-dioxane¹³	A by-product of the process that makes certain skincare ingredients, such as petroleum, less irritating. This carcinogen is found in almost half of all cosmetics.	Linked to cancer and respiratory issues.
Polyethylene glycol (PEG)¹⁴	Often found in cleansers, conditioners, sunscreen, and moisturizers.	PEGs themselves aren’t that bad, though they have been shown to cause irritation. The worry is that they’re easily contaminated with ethylene oxide, a known carcinogen, and 1,4-dioxane, a possible carcinogen.

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Products ending in –eth,¹⁵ such as cetareth and tricetareth	Typically found in anything that hydrates, including moisturizers or conditioners.	Similar to PEGs, these have a high risk of contamination by scarier ingredients.
Petroleum (mineral oil)¹⁶	Often found in moisturizers, petroleum jelly, and mineral oils.	Nontoxic when properly refined, they can be contaminated with PHAs, which are linked to breast cancer.
*Oxybenzone and octinoxate¹⁷	Active ingredient in synthetic chemical sunscreens.	Associated with photoallergic reactions, cardiovascular disease, and potential cell mutations.
Ethanolamines¹⁸ (MEA, DEA, TEA)	Used as pH balancers, this group of chemicals is found in hair dye, mascara, foundation, fragrances, sunscreens, and more.	These chemicals can collect on and in your body and are linked to cancer, allergies, and potential birth defects.
Coal tar¹⁹	A derivative of coal, this is used in synthetic dyes and as an antidandruff agent in hair care products.	Like coal, a known carcinogen—especially through skin exposure.
Talc²⁰	A mineral substance in everything from baby powder to shimmery eye shadow.	Linked to endometrial and ovarian cancer; also can be dangerous if inhaled.
Isobutane²¹	A propellant used in aerosol sprays.	A known carcinogen linked to reproductive issues; especially troublesome when inhaled.
*Phenoxyethanol²²	A preservative often used as an alternative to parabens. Sometimes also found in fragrances.	Classified by the European Union as an irritant and as potentially toxic in products used around the mouth.
Retinyl palmitate²³	A vitamin A derivative found in anti-aging products and acne fighters.	Linked to skin cancer and possible reproductive issues when those using it are exposed to the sun.

*An endocrine disruptor.