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Top 5 Skin Care Myths

As skin care consumers, **BY ADA POLLA** we have become increasingly well versed in cosmetic products and their ingredients. However, still today, a number of skin care myths continue to linger. Let's take a look and determine myth from reality.

Editor's Note: Studies continue to be conducted on these popular skin care concerns. The following is based on information to date.

MYTH #1:

Parabens are dangerous.

The controversy about parabens and their potential involvement in breast cancer centers on the following claim: parabens behave like estrogen, thus increasing the likelihood of cancers, particularly breast cancer. This myth relies on a published paper that reports traces of parabens in breast cancer tissue.¹ Other studies maintain the safety and efficacy of parabens used as preservatives in foods and cosmetics.²

REALITY: Although the debate continues, parabens have an extensive history of safe use in consumer products, including foods and beverages. They also play a critical role in the defense against disease and infection by preventing fungal and bacterial contamination. Parabens are recognized as safe by the World Health Organization, as well as government agencies throughout the world. In the United States, the Cosmetic Ingredient Review arm of the Food & Drug Administration (FDA) recently reviewed parabens and concluded that they are safe for use in cosmetic products.³

With such a track record of safety and efficacy as preservatives and antibacterial agents, parabens are a safer choice than their alternatives, which have not been investigated to the same degree.

MYTH #2:

Mineral oil is comedogenic.

Mineral oil has developed a bad reputation in the world of skin care, being accused of clogging pores and negatively impacting the skin.

REALITY: Mineral oil is commonly used in cosmetics, as it is a lightweight ingredient that is inexpensive, odorless,

tasteless and does not cause allergic reactions. The key in the debate about mineral oil in cosmetics is to recognize

the various grades of mineral oil available. Indeed, industrial-grade mineral oil, which is used as a machine lubricant, is clearly not adequate for use in cosmetic products, and would indeed most likely clog pores. However, cosmetic-grade mineral oil is of a purer quality and has not been demonstrated to clog pores or cause breakouts.

MYTH #3:

Fragrance is bad for your skin.

The media have taken a strong stance against the use of fragrances in skin care products and cosmetics. A perusal of various magazine Web sites suggest that:

- Synthetic fragrances are the No. 1 skin irritant.⁴
- Fragrances cause more allergic contact dermatitis than any other ingredient.⁵
- It is estimated that 5.72 million Americans are allergic to fragrance.⁶

It should be noted that these facts apply to fragrances, not to skin care products containing fragrances.

REALITY: Less than 2 percent of the U.S. population is allergic to fragrances.⁷

Some of the most popular facial skin care products in the United States, including those from Olay, Estée Lauder and Lancôme, contain fragrance.⁸

An industry report on skin care identified a key consumer need: 71 percent of consumers want more sensations from products (i.e., appeal to the five senses).⁹

Furthermore, numerous clinical studies support the benefits of scent, which include:¹⁰

The key in the debate about mineral oil in cosmetics is to recognize the various grades of mineral oil available.

- People perceive those who wear scents as being more attractive, even slimmer.
- Fragrance use can boost self-esteem, reduce stress, enhance memory and increase efficiency and accuracy.
- Fragrances are important in neurological and general well-being: aromas act on the region of the brain that is responsible for memory and emotion.

Finally, the question of concentration is essential to this debate. Indeed, *the fragrance concentration in skin care products rarely exceeds 0.5 percent, versus up to 30 percent in a perfume.* Because of this difference in concentrations, a skin reacting to perfume will not necessarily react to cosmetic products containing fragrance.

MYTH #4: Acne-prone skin should use benzoyl peroxide daily on the entire face.

Benzoyl peroxide is one of the most common and most effective ingredients in a variety of anti-acne products. The "benzoyl" propels "peroxide" into the follicle, releasing oxygen and killing the anaerobic Acne P. bacteria responsible for acne lesions.

REALITY: While benzoyl peroxide does effectively kill the acne-causing bacteria, the side effects are an increased presence of free radicals that may lead to accelerated skin aging. The best recommendation for acne-suffering patients is therefore to use benzoyl peroxide products sparsely, selectively and exclusively on acne-prone areas (e.g., not on the eye contour).

It should be noted that to address this problem, some manufacturers have added antioxidants to their benzoyl peroxide products. However, the con-

cept is flawed: antioxidants prevent the optimal functioning of the benzoyl peroxide, while the latter in turn prevents the antioxidants from functioning effectively. The result: you will have both acne and wrinkles!

MYTH #5: SPF products are enough to protect the skin from sun damage.

Wear an SPF product, in particular with a high SPF factor (30+), reapply it regularly, and you will be completely safe from UV-induced sun damage, whether from UVA or UVB rays.

REALITY: First, SPF terminology is primarily a measure of UVB protection, and therefore, does not apply to UVA rays. Furthermore, most ingredients used in SPF products available in the U.S. market do not block the entire UV spectrum.

SPF filters work in one of two ways: they either absorb UVAs (320–400 nm) and UVBs (290–320 nm), or they reflect these nefarious rays. The more popular metallic ingredients such as zinc or titanium are examples of ingredients that facilitate the reflection of light. Zinc protects from rays ranging from 290–380 nm, whereas titanium protects from rays ranging from



290–340 nm. Neither protect from UVA's 380–400 nm range.

The solution: always complement SPF protection (which, let's be clear, is absolutely essential) with antioxidant protection. Indeed, antioxidants such as green tea effectively neutralize the free radicals that are created due to incomplete reflection or absorption of nefarious UV rays. As such, antioxidants are the skin's second line of defense, and when combined with SPF products, enable the most effective sun protection. **LS**

¹ "Concentrations of Parabens in Human Breast Tumors," P.D. Darbre, A. Aljarrah, W.R. Miller, N.G. Coldham, M.J. Sauer, G.S. Pope, *J of Applied Toxicol.*, v.24, i.1, 1, Jan 2004.

² "Evaluation of the health aspects of methyl paraben: a review of the published literature," M.G. Sony, S.L. Taylor, N.A. Greenberg, G.A. Burdock, *Food Chem Toxicol.*, 40, 1335-1373, 2002.

³ "Safety of ingredients used in cosmetics," W.F. Bergfeld, D.V. Belisito, J.G. Marks Jr., F.A. Andersen, *J Am Acad Dermatol.* 52: 125-132 (2005).

⁴ "Sensitivity Survival Kit," Quote by Dr. Heidi Waldorf, director of Laser and Cosmetic Dermatology at Mount Sinai Medical Center, Shop Etc. November 2005, p. 166.

⁵ American Academy of Dermatology (AAD) Web site, 11-9-05.

⁶ "Label Lingo," *Organic Style*, October 2005, p. 19.

⁷ "Label Lingo," *Organic Style*, October 2005, p. 19. Figure divided by the approximate total US population of 295 million.

⁸ Products gathered from various "best-selling beauty lists" including from Allure, Shape, In Style Magazines; fragrance identified from the products' ingredient listing or by speaking to corporate customer service people.

⁹ As quoted in *International Cosmetic News Magazine*, October 2005, p. 14.

¹⁰ As discussed by fragrance expert Jan Moran in February 2005, and printed on the PR News Now Web site, www.prnewsnow.com