

LUXURY SPA FINDER

THE SPA LIFESTYLE AT ITS FINEST

BEAUTY & BRAINS label literacy

Are parabens perilous?

YOU USUALLY SEE THEM GROUPED WITH THE CRIMINAL element of skin care, as in “no parabens, no petrochemicals, no animal testing.” But should parabens, the most studied synthetic preservatives and antibacterial ingredients in skin care, be in this police lineup?

Not judging by the number of beauty companies using them, about eight in ten, including Alchimie Forever, a Swiss-American line that uses them in its Kantic Mask. Alchimie Forever, like most companies, cites parabens’ track record—80 years of proven performance and low allergenicity—for their widespread use. But that’s a very unpopular stance, says company president Ada Polla Tray, because parabens have such a bad rap. Commercial giant Estée Lauder is eliminating them from its product lines, starting with Aveda and Origins.

It was a study published in a 2004 volume of the *Journal of Applied Toxicology* that got parabens indicted: The researchers found concentrations of parabens in cancerous human breast tissue. Tray says the study was deeply flawed. “We don’t know if parabens are implicated in cancer because the researchers did not study this. They found parabens in 20 tumor samples and in the 6 control samples, which they did not account for. We need large-scale studies to prove or disprove causation, and there hasn’t been a single one. That’s very odd in the research community, especially given the huge response to this study.” Until there’s an antibacterial agent that’s equally effective and doesn’t irritate the skin, Tray says Alchimie Forever will use parabens. “Not using them with our natural ingredients would pose a health risk.”

In other words, to be natural you sometimes must resort to the chemical. That’s borne out by the 33 ingredients in Kantic Mask, which per FDA regulations are listed on the label in order of volume. The predominant ones—blueberry (number 3), wild pansy (4), and oat extract (5)—are natural antioxidants, healers, and moisture providers. Parabens, toward the bottom of the label, constitute only 0.2 percent of the product. Given their track record, I think parabens should be treated with the same presumption defendants are: innocent until proven guilty.

Alchimie Forever
Kantic Mask,
US\$60,
www.alchimie
forever.com



- NO. 3 VACCINIUM MYRTILLUS
Blueberry extract. A flavonoid antioxidant in the blueberry family; protects capillaries and soothes redness.
- NO. 4 VIOLA TRICOLOR
Wild-pansy extract. Homeopathic remedy for rashes, itches, and dryness.
- NO. 5 AVENA SATIVA KERNEL EXTRACT
Colloidal oats. Gentle, skin-soothing ingredient and stabilizer.
- NO. 6 VITIS VINIFERA EXTRACT
Grape extract. Antioxidant and beneficial base ingredient.
- NO. 25 METHYLPARABEN
Food-grade preservative, deemed nontoxic and nonirritating by a 2002 study in *Food and Chemical Toxicology*; antibacterial.
- NO. 26 PROPYLPARABEN
Fungicidal and antibacterial. Nontoxic and nonirritating at 0.02 percent.
- NOS. 27 AND 28 ETHYLPARABEN AND BUTYLPARABEN
Combined with phenoxyethanol (no. 24), create a “formaldehyde-free preservative system with protection against bacteria, yeast, and mold,” says Tray.

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