

Deeper than cosmetic concerns

As health issues arise over makeup, natural products gain popularity

ABBY LUBY • FOR LIVING & BEING • MARCH 28, 2010

Lipstick on a boyfriend's collar used to be a sign of betrayal — but the real infidelity isn't in the kiss but the lipstick's ingredients.

In the fall, the Food and Drug Administration issued a new study showing most lipsticks contain high amounts of lead. An estimated four pounds (1.8 kilograms) of lipstick is swabbed over the lifetime of an average lipstick-wearer, according to the Environmental Working Group.

This is worrisome because lead is a potent neurotoxin linked to numerous health and reproductive problems. Pregnant women are particularly vulnerable to lead in lipstick, according to the FDA study, because lead easily crosses the placenta and enters the fetal brain, where it can interfere with normal development.



Kiss My Face, a company started in the early 1980s, was one of the first natural skin-care companies to develop a full line of organic skin products. Organic skin-care products are growing in popularity, but consumers should be aware that "natural" doesn't always mean "safe." (Spencer Ainsley/Living & Being)

But lipstick isn't the only cosmetic to cause concern. Lurking in our daytime moisturizers, makeup, foundation, age-fighting serums, body gels and hand lotions are a host of harmful chemicals including formaldehyde (a preservative that is a known carcinogen) 1, 4-dioxane (an industrial solvent or foaming agent that is a suspected carcinogen), sodium lauryl sulfate (a foaming agent and possible carcinogen and irritant) and parabens.

Parabens figure high on the danger list of toxic ingredients and are widely used in cosmetics, says Nneka Leiba, a researcher with the Environmental Working

Group. The Environmental Working Group posts harmful cosmetics on its popular Web site "Skin Deep."

Leiba said parabens are "estrogenic."

"That means that parabens mimic estrogen, which can disrupt hormone systems that guide so many processes in the body. If the hormone system is disrupted, it is a concern," she said.

Parabens are preservatives that prevent bacterial growth in cosmetics to increase products' shelf lives. A recent study found parabens inside breast cancer tumors.

It's hard to associate the "feel-good" routine of putting on makeup and using smooth, healing moisturizing cream with something dangerous.

But over the past few decades, a growing number of studies and research showed multiple, adverse affects of chemically laden skin products. This resulted in the launching of the organic cosmetic industry.

Ushering in the use of natural cosmetics was a company started in the early 1980s by Bob MacLeod and Stephen Byckiewicz called Kiss My Face. Based in Gardiner, Kiss My Face was one of the first natural skin-care companies to develop a full line of organic skin products.

Today, the \$30 million company is known worldwide for its line of more than 200 bath and body, oral care, cosmetic and home products. MacLeod said the industry has changed a lot since they started peddling their first product, olive oil soap, out of their Volkswagen van.

"The demand is there that didn't exist before. What also changed quite a bit for us over the years is the amount of raw materials that have become available to us — much more so than when we first started out."

MacLeod and Byckiewicz first targeted consumers who actively purchased organic and natural products. They delivered their soaps to health food stores in the Hudson Valley and New York City.

"Eating more natural and organic made it easy to transition to natural body care," Byckiewicz said. "If you're spending all that energy on eating right, it makes sense that you would then look at what you are putting on your body."

Gabby Antinora, store manager at Mother Earth's Storehouse in Poughkeepsie, is witnessing the growing demand for natural cosmetics.

"Collectively, as a whole, everybody has different reasons for using healthy skin

products," Antinora said.

"Some people are changing their lifestyle and have become vegan. They are more conscientious of what they are putting on their skin and body. Lately I've noticed that more young people are living the healthy lifestyle of their parents and they want to repeat it with their own kids."

Antinora said she has seen consumer interest surge in natural skin products in the last three years as more stores are offering natural and organic products.

Wendy Pecoraro said she does 90 percent of her shopping at Mother Earth's Storehouse for organic skin products for herself and her 5-year-old son.

"I've been buying organic products for 20 years. When I first started, I not only switched over to organic foods, but cosmetics as well."

Pecoraro, 42, a home school teacher in Poughkeepsie, said she remembers there was a noticeable change in her health.

"I had higher energy levels and my outlook on life changed. It was a total 180 degree turn-around in how I felt."

Among the popular mainstay companies making natural and organic skin products are Aubrey, Kiss My Face, Nature's Gate, Rainbow Research, Jason, Tom's, The Merry Hempsters, Burts Bees, Reviva, derma-e. Choosing from the myriad of natural skin-care companies takes some adjustment.

"Because Aubrey is the closest to natural, their products have a shorter shelf life," said Tisa Loewen, assistant manager at Vitamin Shoppe in Poughkeepsie. "Some people aren't used to seeing the oils separate from the solids, and they don't like it, but in actuality, Aubrey is the closest to pure."

Even though the healthy skin-product choices are numerous, there are several caveats for consumers. Leiba warns a product using the word "natural" doesn't necessarily mean a product is safe.

"There are some natural ingredients that shouldn't be used on your skin, like tomatoes, which are very acidic. Also, essential oils from different plants are natural but may irritate the skin. Consumers shouldn't be fooled by a product just because it uses the word 'natural.' "

Another local natural cosmetics provider is B.LO Cosmetics, a cyber business launched in December by Spackenkill High School senior Brittany Ann Lo. She recently started selling mascara at www.blocosmetics.com for \$14.99.

"I sought out a company that could formulate the ingredients. When it was done, I tried it out and I loved it. The next item will be eyeliner and then foundation."

Lo's mascara uses only soy protein and vitamin E, and she said it will not be tested on animals. She wants her cosmetics to appeal to environmentally aware people.

"So many people who are eco-friendly find what they put on their skin is as important. Essentially, you want to be putting natural products on your skin, products that will help you."

RESOURCES

Mother Earth's Storehouse1955 South RoadPoughkeepsie, NY 12601-6029845-296-1069

Vitamin Shoppe1936 South RoadPoughkeepsie, NY 12601845-296-0790

Kiss My Face144 Main St.Gardiner, NY 12525-5226845-255-0884www.kissmyface.com

B.LO Cosmetics:blocosmetics.com/shop.htm