

ENVIRONMENT

Bathroom Detox©

by Valentine Rinner



In the past few years, we've witnessed the slow emergence of the no-culture. What used to be an undercurrent is now more and more mainstream. From no-gluten to no-paraben, from low-fat to low-poo, from lactose-free to phthalate-free, it's all about what's NOT in what you buy. While it can quickly get annoying and easy to make fun of, this no-culture has got some things right.

In the last half-century, thousands of products full of new molecules have colonized our kitchens and bathrooms. Their names are unpronounceable although a few families such as parabens or BPA have made it into everyday language, after health scandals accused them of being carcinogens or hormone disrupting.

This week we'll talk about what we put into our bodies through our skin. Indeed, when applying a cream or makeup or any product in your daily hygiene routine you may be adding a bit more than just a simple touch of color or moisture to your body. Between metal in lipsticks, herbicide in tampons and endocrine disruptors in baby products, we have seen quite a few scandals recently in the hygiene industry. All of them hiding behind reassuring messages such as hypoallergenic, no-something, natural or extra-soft. Those "dirty" ingredients are especially dangerous if not rinsed off - such as moisturizing creams, makeup or wipes - because they go through our skin and into our blood. Some people are more at risk than others for example pregnant women, babies and children. However all of us should have a look at what we put on our skin and hair, and be aware of the risks associated if some of those ingredients get into our bodies.

Identifying suspicious substances is quite an intimidating and lengthy process at first... take just one of your daily products and have a tiny peek at the ingredients' list. Quite scary. Italic Latin names are natural ingredients such as plant extracts. Names in your language are minerals or chemicals, which doesn't mean they're good or bad. To distinguish the good from the bad some health or environmental agencies have shortlisted the worst offenders. For example the Environmental Working Group has identified 12 basic but dangerous items also called the Dirty Dozen that you can find in all sorts of everyday products.

However the easiest way to get into the process of evaluating your products is to download one of the free apps made to facilitate your shopping choice, such as Skin Deep, Think Dirty, or the French collaborative version “Notéo”. They rate products on criteria like cancer threats, allergens, and developmental or reproductive toxicity, but also environmental impact, social responsibility or budget.

So what do I do if my favorite shampoo is on the no-go list? Again those apps are quite friendly as they suggest alternatives to the product you’ve just researched. Another option is to look for products under one of the well-established labels that fight greenwashing and false marketing in industry. Several are emerging with “Slow Cosmetic” well ahead. This Belgian organization has a francophone website that indexes all the products that have made it under the label, most of which you can buy online. They also give advice on how to detoxify your routine. You’ll be surprised at how easy it is to adopt a healthier routine and how much you, your health and your wallet can benefit from small changes!