Detox Your Life - Hidden Chemicals in Personal Care Products (Part 3) Transcript

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Introduction to Sun Safety and Doctor Talks

Sunlight is essential for vitamin D production, and it plays a big role in our physical and mental health. Getting outdoors and soaking up the sun safely can support everything from our mood to our immune system.

That said, too much UV exposure can definitely be harmful. Most of us have experienced this firsthand. Sunburn is literally skin damage, and we know that UV radiation is the number one modifiable risk factor for developing skin cancer.

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Welcome back. I hope you had a chance to go through your kitchen cabinets and drawers last week, and maybe even find some creative new homes for the plastic items that you're starting to phase out.

Bathroom Product Safety Overview

For instance, we're now using some of our old plastic containers to store paints and art supplies for craft projects. Small steps like that really do add up.

So this week, we're stepping out of the kitchen and into the bathroom to take a closer look at personal care products. Things like shampoo, deodorant, sunscreens, and nail polish.

And I want to acknowledge something right away. This topic can feel overwhelming. If you've ever picked up a bottle of lotion or foundation and tried to make sense of the ingredient list, you're definitely not alone.

If you felt like you needed a chemistry degree just to understand it, it's easy to feel confused or even guilty for using everyday products. But I promise, by the end of today you'll feel much more empowered.

You'll know what to look for, what to avoid, and how to start making simple, stress free swaps that support your health. The good news is, you don't need to be a detective or have a PhD in chemistry to make healthier choices, and you definitely don't need to memorize every single ingredient on a product label.

That would be overwhelming for anyone. Instead, we'll focus on a few key ingredients that are both common and concerning. The ones that show up most often in personal care products and have the strongest links to health issues.

Once you know how to spot these red flags, you'll be able to make confident, informed decisions without getting lost in the fine print. This week, we'll look at exposures we get primarily through absorption and inhalation.

Before we dive into ingredients, let's take a moment to talk about why this conversation even matters. Most people assume that a product is sitting on a store shelf, especially one we put on our skin or on our kids.

It must have been thoroughly tested and approved by some government agency to make sure it's safe. But

unfortunately, here in the US, that's just not the case.

The personal care industry is surprisingly under regulated, and many products go to market without any required safety testing. That means it's largely up to us, the consumers, to pay attention to what we're using and why education like this is so important.

So let's take a minute to talk about how cosmetics are regulated in the US, because it tends to surprise people. The first federal law on this topic was the food, drug, and Cosmetic Act, passed all the way back in 1938.

Under that law, the FDA defined cosmetics as anything applied to the body for cleansing, beautifying, or altering appearance. So things like lotion, shampoo, makeup, deodorant, and perfume.

But here's the key thing. The law wasn't really about ingredient safety. It was mostly designed to prevent contamination and ensure accurate labeling.

And while the FDA often gets criticized for not doing more, the reality is that Congress never gave them the authority to regulate cosmetic ingredients.

Cosmetic Regulation and MACRA Updates

So for over 75 years, the FDA has been working with outdated rules and limited power until very recently. More on that coming up. For decades, the FDA placed the responsibility for product safety squarely on the shoulders of manufacturers, but without actually requiring them to prove anything.

Companies were expected to ensure the safety of their own products and ingredients. Yet they weren't obliged to share any of that safety data with the FDA.

Even if the FDA asked for it, this is what I like to call the trust us, it's safe loophole. In fact, the FDA's own website states companies and individuals who manufacture or market cosmetics have a legal responsibility to ensure the safety of their products.

Neither the law nor FDA regulations require specific tests to demonstrate the safety of individual products or ingredients. Also, the law does not require cosmetic companies to share their safety information with the FDA.

What that really means is, aside from color additives, cosmetic ingredients can be used in products without any FDA approval at all. To date, the FDA has banned or restricted 33 ingredients for use in personal care products.

Some of these date back to 1938. More recent additions to this list include asbestos and talc in the 1970s, although in reality this is still very much a problem.

Red dye number three. In the 1990s and more recently, triclosan and 18 other antibacterial ingredients were banned, but only in soaps and hand sanitizers, so they can still be found in cosmetics and lastly, microbeads due to their environmental impact.

In contrast, Canada has banned or restricted around 600 ingredients and the European Union over 1400. While progress on cosmetic safety has been incredibly slow, there's finally a reason to be hopeful.

At the end of 2022, Congress passed the first major update to the cosmetics regulations since 1938, called the Modernization of Cosmetics Regulation Act, or Macra.

Is it perfect? No, it doesn't ban all harmful ingredients or solve every issue, but it's a meaningful step in the right direction. For the first time, companies are now required to report serious adverse events to the FDA.

Things like severe rashes, burns, or even cases of blindness. Unfortunately, long term risks like hormone disruption or cancer still aren't covered under the definition.

But at least we're starting to build the foundation. Macra also now requires companies to register their products and ingredients with the FDA. It's hard to believe, but until now, there was no national system tracking what's actually in the cosmetics we use.

Some states, like California, had stricter rules, but now that kind of transparency is being applied nationwide. Another big shift. Companies must now substantiate the safety of their ingredients, meaning they need real data to prove that their products are safe at the levels used.

That's a big departure from the old grandfathered in approach. Consumers also get more transparency, as companies must now disclose fragrance, fragrance, allergens and list ingredients in professional salon products, something that wasn't required before and maybe the biggest change.

The FDA has finally the authority to issue mandatory recalls for unsafe products. Instead of relying on companies to do it voluntarily, these updates were set to go into the into effect by the end of 2023.

So we're just beginning to see how they'll be implemented. That said, Morris still doesn't ban many of the problematic ingredients found in everyday products.

Which brings us to what we'll cover next. Let's start by briefly talking about our skin, where the majority of these products are being applied. Our skin is technically our largest organ, clocking in at 16% of our body weight.

It helps protect us from bacteria, UV eration, UV radiation to a point, and many other things. Many people will say our skin is like a sponge, but it's not.

You've probably seen this claim on, online or social media. It only takes 26 seconds for the chemicals in your personal care products to enter your bloodstream.

It sounds dramatic and concerning, but it's not actually true. While it's absolutely worth paying attention to what we put on our skin, this statement oversimplifies a very complex process.

The truth is that some ingredients can be absorbed through the skin, but whether they make it into the bloodstream depends on many factors like the size and structure of the chemical, whether the product contains ingredients that help it penetrate the skin, and even the condition of your skin itself.

Things like hydration, skin integrity, and environmental humidity can play a role. So yes, some absorption can happen, but not everything we apply ends up in our bloodstream and certainly not in 26 seconds.

It's important to be aware, but also to be guided by accurate information rather than fear based messaging. Let's get into some specifics about personal care products.

Let's take a step back and look at the big picture when it comes to personal care product use. Almost 20 years ago, the environment a working group, or EWG, did a survey of over 2300 people and found something pretty eye opening.

The average adult uses nine personal care products a day, containing around 126 different chemical ingredients for women. That number is even higher, on average 12 products a day, with about 168 unique ingredients, and 25% of women were using 15 or more products daily.

Men were lower, averaging around six products a day.

Skin Absorption and Daily Product Exposure

But still, that adds up. Now think about your typical morning routine. Toothpaste. Face wash. Shampoo. Conditioner. Body wash. Lotion. Deodorant. Makeup. Sunscreen.

It adds up fast and that's before you've even left the bathroom. Now, as I mentioned in week one, not all chemicals are bad. And no, not all of those 168 ingredients are harmful.

But there definitely are some in the mix that we should be concerned about, and that's what we're going to focus on today. We'll go through a few key categories of personal care products, highlight the main ingredients of concern, and then talk about better alternatives that you can use instead.

There are literally hundreds of products out there, but the good news is that many of them use the same common ingredients. So by learning a few key ones to avoid, you can make better choices across the board.

Let's start with one of the biggest offenders. When it comes to hidden chemicals, fragrance or perfume, you'll find it in almost everything. Personal care products, household cleaners, air fresheners, candles, detergents, basically anything that smells like something.

Here's the issue. There are over 3000 different chemicals that fragrance chemists can use to create a scent. Some of them are synthetic. Some are natural.

But here's the important part. Natural doesn't always mean safe. Just think about it. Lead. Arsenic and asbestos are all natural substances, and we definitely don't want those in our products.

Many fragrance ingredients have been linked to things like allergies, respiratory irritation, headaches, and even migraines. And right now, companies don't have to tell us what's in their fragrance blends.

They're considered trade secrets, so they can just list a fragrance on the label and leave it at that. There's some progress, though. In California, a law passed in 2020 now requires disclosure of certain fragrance chemicals under the Moca.

Under Moca. Companies will need to start disclosing fragrance allergens to. And in Canada, there's legislation being considered that would ban the generic term fragrance altogether.

Companies would have to actually list out the ingredients they're using. And this really matters. A 2009 survey found that nearly 30% of people in the US reported some kind of fragrance sensitivity.

That's a huge portion of the population dealing with irritation or symptoms from everyday products. There are 26 known fragrance fragrance allergens as identified by the European Union Cosmetics Directive.

It's important to note that many of these allergens are natural compounds and can also be found in essential oils. The bigger concern, though, is with phthalates, a class of chemicals, some of which are used as a fixative in fragrance mixtures and to help the fragrance last longer.

Phthalates have been measured in over 95% of the population, and according to the CDC, adult women have higher levels than men. Specifically for the phthalates, used in personal care products.

As we mentioned last week, we can also be exposed to phthalates via food packaging and in particular, soft plastics. Let's talk about phthalates. One of the most heavily studied chemical groups in the consumer products.

The reason there's so much research on this item is simple. They're everywhere. And the most and the most science is pretty clear. Edit this please. Let's start again at slide 18.

So let's talk about phthalates. The reason there's so much research on them is simple. They're everywhere. And the science is pretty clear.

Fragrance, Phthalates, and Parabens

Most phthalates are well known hormone disruptors. And decades of study studies have linked them to a wide

range of health issues. These include early puberty in girls, breast cancer, male birth defects, metabolic disorders like diabetes and obesity, thyroid dysfunction, PCOS, endometriosis, allergies, asthma, and even developmental delays in children.

They've also been associated with decreased testosterone in women and worsened menopausal symptoms like hot flashes. The tricky part is you won't see phthalates listed on an ingredient label.

That's because they're often hidden inside fragrance formulations, which are considered proprietary and protected trade secrets. So when you see the word fragrance on a label, there's a good chance that phthalates are lurking there.

Unless the product specifically says it's phthalate free. And even then, that label doesn't necessarily mean it's free of other hormone disruptors or allergens.

It's definitely a proceed with caution situation, especially if you're trying to reduce your overall toxic burden. Now let's talk about parabens like phthalates.

Parabens aren't just a single ingredient. They're a whole group of chemicals used as preservatives to keep products like lotions, shampoos, and makeup from growing bacteria or mold.

And while that function is important, there's a catch. Parabens are also well known as endocrine disruptors, meaning they can interfere with our hormone systems.

They're incredibly common. Found in an estimated 75 to 90% of personal care products. While the amount in any one item is small, usually between.01 percent and 0.3%.

The real issue is cumulative exposure. Most of us use multiple products every day. Shampoo. Conditioner. Deodorant. Lotion and sunscreen. Makeup. And those small doses add up quickly.

Our endocrine system is highly sensitive to even tiny amounts of hormones, so low dose exposure from multiple sources matter. Parabens have been detected in semen, menstrual blood, breast tissue, breast milk, umbilical cord blood and urine, which tells us that they're circulating throughout the body.

Parabens in 100% of urine samples from pregnant women in the US. Edit that please. In fact, in one study, the parabens were found in 100% of the urine samples from pregnant women in the US.

That's why researchers and health advocates are paying such close attention, because these exposures are consistent, cumulative, and happening during some of the most sensitive stages of life.

Parabens have been linked to a number of health concerns, including the proliferation of breast cancer cells with interference with breast cancer treatments like tamoxifen.

They've also been associated with allergies, asthma, thyroid issues, infertility, and metabolic conditions such as insulin dependance. Sorry, insulin resistance, obesity and type two diabetes.

While more research is always unfolding, the existing evidence makes a stronger case for minimizing regular long term exposure. The good news is parabens are actually pretty easy to spot on the ingredient labels if you know what to look for.

Just scan for any word that ends in paraben. That's it. That's your red flag. If you see it, it's a good idea to put the product back and choose a cleaner option.

And here's a quick reminder. Phthalates and parabens are two of the most common and the most concerning chemical groups in personal care products. Even if you did nothing else but avoid those, you're all you'd already be taking a big step toward lowering your daily toxic load.

But we're not stopping there. Next, we'll cover a few more ingredients that tend to pop up in specific types of products so you can get even more strategic about what you want to avoid.

We'll start with sunscreen. Let's talk about sunshine because we actually need it. Sunlight is essential for vitamin D production, and it plays a big role in our physical and mental health.

Getting outdoors and soaking up the sun safely can support everything from our mood to our immune system. That said, too much UV exposure can definitely be harmful.

Most of us have experienced this firsthand. Sunburn is literally skin damage and we know that UV radiation is the number one modifiable risk factor for developing skin cancer.

So how do we protect ourselves? The first line of defense should always be protective clothing, hats, and seeking shade when needed. But a sunscreen can also be a helpful tool to lower your risk, especially when you're out for long periods of time.

In recent years, though, sunscreen ingredients themselves have come under the microscope. Some have raised concerns about hormone disruption, absorption into the bloodstream, and environmental impacts, especially on coral reefs and marine life.

So let's take a closer look at some of the specific ingredients we want to watch out for and talk about safer sunscreen options that you can feel good about using.

Let's start with oxybenzone, one of the most commonly used ingredients in chemical sunscreens. It's popular because it effectively absorbs both UVA and UVB rays, giving that broad spectrum, protection we look for.

UVB rays are what caused sunburn, while UVA rays penetrate deeper and are linked to aging of the skin and skin cancer. But here's the concern. About two thirds of US sunscreens contain oxybenzone.

And research shows it's easily absorbed through the skin, even after just one application, and it doesn't stay on the surface. It gets into the bloodstream.

Oxybenzone is a known endocrine disruptor, meaning it can interfere with hormone function, and it's even been detected in breast milk. Studies have also linked it to reduced semen quality, other reproductive issues, and allergic skin reactions.

Because of these risks, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends avoiding it in children's sunscreens and beyond human health. It's also a threat to marine life.

Hawaii has banned oxybenzone due to its role in coral bleaching. So while it works for sunscreen for some protection, there are much safe. For more sustainable alternatives worth choosing instead.

Another chemical sunscreen ingredient to keep an eye on is locked up. DonOt edit that please. Slide 25.

Sunscreen Ingredients and Safer Protection

Another chemical sunscreen ingredient to keep an eye on is octinoxate. Like oxybenzone. It's commonly used, and it has also raised concerns about endocrine disruption, especially when it comes to its potential effects on the thyroid.

And just like oxybenzone, zone octinoxate has been linked to coral bleaching, which is why it's also banned in places like Hawaii to help protect marine ecosystems.

So again, while these ingredients are effective at blocking UV rays, they come with trade offs both for our health and the environment. And there are cleaner, safer alternatives we'll talk about shortly.

Let's take a quick look at two more chemical sunscreen ingredients that are raising concerns avo, benzocaine and octocrylene. These are commonly found in the in the sunscreens and SPF label products like moisturizers and makeup.

The issue is that both have been shown to interfere with metabolism and are classified as obese organic chemicals, meaning they contribute to weight gain and metabolic dysfunction.

Not exactly what you want for something that you apply daily. What's more, AVO Ben Zone is actually unstable in sunlight and can lose up to 90% of its effectiveness with an hour of sun exposure.

To make it more stable, it's often paired with octocrylene, which adds to the overall chemical load. So while they may technically help with sun protection, they come with trade offs in both health impact and performance.

We'll definitely be talking about safer sunscreen options a little later, but I want to quickly flag something important about spray sunscreen. Regardless of the ingredients that they can turn contain, sprays might seem super convenient, especially for kids or hard to reach areas, but they come with a few serious concerns.

First, there's the issue of inhalation. When you spray a sunscreen, you're not just coating your skin, you're also breathing in those particles, which can include potentially harmful chemicals.

That's especially concerning for children or anyone with asthma or asthma or other respiratory issues. Second, the spray sunscreens often don't provide even coverage, so you're more likely to miss spots or get less protection overall, which kind of defeats the purpose.

And finally, many aerosol products have been found to be contaminated with benzene, a known carcinogen. That's somebody that's something that no one wants in their sunscreen.

Now, of course, there are exceptions. If someone has a mobility challenges or a condition that makes applying lotion difficult, spray sunscreens might be the most practical choice.

But for most people, it's best to stick with lotions or mineral sticks instead. Before we move on, I want to clear up a common myth you may see online.

The idea that sunscreen causes cancer, not the sun. This reality is that the reality is that cancer is complex and rarely caused by one single thing. But we do know that excessive UV exposure is a well-established, major risk factor for skin cancer.

In fact, it's considered the most important modifiable risk factor, meaning it's something we can actively reduce. Everyone's skin is different, and you know what works best for yours.

Keep in mind that shade, clothing and hats offer excellent protection. Sometimes even better than sunscreen. And here's an important reminder if you're out in the sun and don't have access to a clean sunscreen, it's okay to use whatever's available.

Occasional chemical exposure isn't what drives long term health. It's your daily habits that matter most. The goal isn't perfection. It's making smart, balanced choices in a world that will never be completely toxin free.

All right. Next up is nail polish. And before you get mad, don't worry. I'm not here to take away your manicures. I totally get it. For a lot of people, getting your nails done is a form of self-care.

Maybe even a not and maybe even non-negotiable. And that's okay. Just remember, the goal here isn't to create fear or guilt is to inform and empower you.

Once you know what's in your products, you can make more intentional choices about where you want to reduce exposure. So let's talk about what might be lurking in your favorite polishes and what to look for.

If you want to make a cleaner switch without giving up your favorite ritual. Millions of people regularly get both manicures and pedicures, and they are.

Along with dyeing your hair. One of the practices people tend to resist moving away from over the years. There are. There are a few chemicals in nail polishes that have been used less and less due to consumer awareness and demand.

Let's talk about let's take a look at those first. Let's take a closer look at what's in nail polish and why it matters. For years, most formulas included what's called the toxic trio formaldehyde, toluene, and diluted phthalate.

Formaldehyde is a known carcinogen linked to leukemia and brain cancer, especially with long term exposure, something nail salon workers face daily. Tall viewing can cause dizziness, headaches, and respiratory irritation, and it's also been tied to reproductive and heart health issues.

Debut tool phthalate is an endocrine disruptor and a reproductive toxicant that's banned in the EU, but still used in some products here. The good news is that many brands have removed these ingredients, and you might see labels like three free or five free as a result.

But once companies started marketing seven free or 13 free formulas, things got murky. Some began including ingredients that were never used in nail polish just to seem safer.

So while the industry is moving in the right direction, those labels can be misleading. It's still important to look beyond the marketing and stay informed.

A few other ingredients of concern to be on the lookout for include these. The challenge with reading ingredients on nail polish is that the print is microscopic, so it's often easier to look on a company's website.

I wish I could say that acrylic and gel nails were a safer alternative, but unfortunately they come with their own set of concerns. The ingredients used in both are often just as toxic as those in the traditional nail polish.

Sometimes even more so. Plus, when acrylic nails are filed or drilled, they release fine plastic particles in the form of dust that can be inhaled, which poses an added risk, especially for nail techs who are exposed to it regularly.

Then there's the issue of the UV light used to cure the gel polish. These devices are essentially mini tanning beds for your hands, while the UV exposure is lower than a tanning bed.

Consistent use has been linked to an increased risk of skin cancer, particularly on the tops of the hands. Some salons now use LED dryers, which emit less UV radiation, and that's a step in the right direction.

If you're getting your nails gel, if you're getting gels, often, wearing fingerless gloves during your manicure is another simple way to protect your skin.

Nail Polish Risks and Cleaner Alternatives

At the end of the day, it's all about being aware of the risks and making small, thoughtful choices to reduce exposure where you can. The issue with nail polish, like most other personal care products, matter more if you use it frequently.

If you get your nails done a few times a year, I wouldn't sweat this too much. All right. Last but definitely not least, let's talk about hair dye. Now, I know this one can hit close to home.

For many of us, our hair is a big part of our identity, and how we wear it can really impact how we feel about ourselves. So this is one of those topics that can feel a little sensitive.

And that's totally okay. Just like everything else we've talked about today, this isn't about guilt or telling you what

you should or shouldn't do. It's about helping you understand what's in the products that you're using, so you can be informed so you can make informed choices, especially if you're using them regularly, or if you're already working to reduce your overall toxic load.

So let's take a look at what's actually in hair dye, what the concerns are, and some safer alternatives that might work for you without having to sacrifice how you want to show up in the world.

It's no surprise that around 75% of women in the US color their hair. It's such a normal part of beauty and self-care routines, but it's worth looking at what's actually in hair dye because the chemicals used can be absorbed through the skin and inhaled during application.

Like many other products we've discussed, the risk is much higher for salon professionals who are exposed to these ingredients all day, every day. But one key difference with hair dye is that many of the chemicals involved aren't just linked to long term health issues, they can also cause immediate, sometimes severe reaction.

Ingredients like PPD, resource nail and toluene to fight diamine are some of the most common culprits. These compounds can trigger anything from skin irritation and rashes to serious allergic responses.

So even though hair coloring is so common, it's important to understand the risks, especially if you color your hair often or work in an environment where exposure is frequent.

We'll talk about safer options shortly, but awareness is the first step. I know this part might be a little unsettling, but it's important to talk about if you've ever searched for images of allergic reaction to hair dye.

You've probably seen some pretty intense and upsetting photos. Things like severe swelling, blistering, and burns. These aren't just rare horror stories, they're real consequences that can happen when the body reacts to certain chemicals in the hair dye.

That's why dye boxes always include a warning to do a patch test at least 24 hours before use. And I get it. It's easy to dismiss, especially if you've dyed your hair many times without a problem.

But many of these ingredients are what we call sensitize, meaning your body can build up a reaction over time. You may be totally fine for years and then suddenly have a serious reaction out of the blue.

It's also worth noting that darker hair dyes usually contain more of these problematic chemicals, which mean a higher risk of reaction. Lightning or highlighting isn't risk free, but it does tend to be less reactive in this way.

So again, it's not about fear. It's about being informed. If you choose to color your hair, that simple patch test can really make a difference, especially as your body's tolerance can change over time.

Let's talk about another super popular hair treatment. Hair straightening, often known as a Brazilian blowout or a keratin treatment. These treatments can make hair smoother and straighter for several months, which sounds great on the surface.

But there's a catch. The main chemical used to create that sleek, long lasting effect is formaldehyde, a known carcinogen. And while salon professionals face the greatest risk to repeated exposure in enclosed spaces, clients aren't in the clear either.

Especially during the application process when heat is used and chemical vapors are released. To make things more confusing. Many salons now advertise formaldehyde free treatments.

But this can be misleading.

Hair Dye, Straightening, and Safer Options

Instead of using formaldehyde directly, they often use a chemical called formalin, which releases formaldehyde gas when heated. So you're still being exposed just through a different route.

It's a lot like the marketing tricks we've seen with the BPA free plastics, or PFOA free cookware, where the replacement chemical behaves the same way under certain conditions.

The American Cancer Society even notes how formaldehyde can hide under different names on labels, making it tough to spot. So if you're considering a treatment like this, it's worth weighing the short term esthetic benefits against the potential long term health risks, especially if you're doing them frequently.

And here's where it gets especially important to pay attention. Because because of the formaldehyde and the other hormone disrupting chemicals in these hair straightening treatments, researchers have found a link between frequent use and an increased risk of certain hormone related cancers in women.

In fact, a study that came out in late 2022 found that women who use chemical hair straighteners four or more times a year have more than double the risk of developing uterine cancer compared to women who didn't use them.

That's a pretty significant finding, and one that adds to a growing body of research showing that what we put on our bodies can absolutely affect what's happening inside our bodies.

So again, this isn't about fear. It's about being informed, especially if these treatments are something you're using regularly or have in your routine.

Okay. Deep breath. I know that was a lot of heavy information to take in. But remember, the whole point of this course is not to overwhelm you. Is to empower you with simple, practical steps you can take to reduce your exposure.

So let's shift gears and talk about what you can actually do. We started this session by looking at phthalates and parabens. Two of the most common endocrine disrupting chemicals found in everyday personal care products.

They're in everything from shampoo and lotion to makeup and deodorant. But here's the good news. They're also some of the easiest ingredients to spot and avoid.

Once you know what to look for, let's walk through some realistic, manageable swaps and habits that can make a big difference over time. If you only make one change after everything we've covered.

Let it be this. Aim to go fragrance free and phthalate free in as many products as possible. The reason this matters so much is because fragrance on a label often acts as a loophole for phthalates to sneak in.

It's not a guarantee that they're present, but it's a strong clue by avoiding products that list fragrance. You're already cutting out a major source of daily exposure.

If you see phthalate free on a label, that's a good sign. It means the company is paying attention and making safer choices. Sometimes you'll see both phthalate free and fragrance listed, which usually means they're using a phthalate three phthalate free fragrance blend.

These can still cause allergic reactions for some, but if you're not sensitive and want a lightly scented option, it can be a reasonable middle ground.

As always, it's not about being perfect. It's about making informed, healthier choices that feel realistic and sustainable for you. We also want to aim for paraben free products whenever possible.

Now, just a quick reminder parabens are preservatives, and preservatives aren't inherently bad. In fact, they serve an important role. They help prevent bacteria and mold from growing in your products, especially anything that

contains water.

So we do want some kind of preservative in there. We just want to choose better ones. When you're reading labels, keep an eye out for the common parabens we talked about earlier.

Anything ending in the word paraben. And instead, look for alternative preservatives that are considered safer and less likely to disrupt hormones. We'll go over a list of options next so you'll know exactly what to look for.

Okay, finally, some good news. Both phthalates and parabens are considered non persistent chemicals, which means they don't stay in your body long term or build up over time like some other toxins.

So when you reduce your exposure, your body actually starts clearing them out pretty quickly. And the research on this is really encouraging. One study, published in early 2023 looked at healthy women with no history of breast cancer, but who had elevated breast cancer markers after just 28 days of avoiding personal care products that contain phthalates and parabens.

Those markers returned to normal. That's a big deal. The researchers even suggested that reducing exposures to these ingredients could be a biologically plausible prevention strategy for breast cancer.

So this is where we move from focusing on what's wrong with focusing on what's wrong to what's possible, because small changes can make a meaningful difference, often faster than we think.

When it comes to choosing a safer sunscreen, there are a couple of key things to keep in mind. First off, opt for lotion based sunscreens instead of sprays or aerosols.

Even if the ingredients are clean, sprays carry risks like inhalation and often don't provide reliable coverage. Second, and this one's really important, take a look for sunscreens that use zinc oxide as the active ingredient.

Zinc oxide is a physical or a mineral blocker that offers broad spectrum protection without the hormone disrupting concerns linked to many chemical sunscreens.

Now, I know you might be thinking, isn't that the stuff that made me look like a lifeguard from the 90s? Fair question. But the good news is formulations have come a long way.

While zinc sunscreens used to be thick, chalky and leave a white cast, a newer versions are much more wearable, smooth, lightweight and even suitable for darker skin tones, so you can get excellent protection without feeling like you've smeared toothpaste on your face.

Just like with other personal care products, there are now safer options for nail polish, too. One of the best alternatives is a water based nail nail polish.

It's especially great for kids who love to paint their nails. And while it can be a little harder to find and a bit more, take a bit more effort to remove.

It's a great way to avoid the more toxic ingredients altogether. Another fun option that's gained popularity is nail stickers. They're easy to apply and less likely, less toxic than traditional polish.

But since we don't have much long term research on them yet, they're best used in moderation. Think of them as a yellow light product. And of course, the cleanest option from a toxin standpoint is going polish free.

You can still enjoy manicures and pedicures by choosing a natural look or getting your nails buffered instead. Buffing gives your nails a smooth, glossy shine without using any chemicals at all.

And it's a great way to keep them looking healthy and well cared for. When it comes to hair color and texture, the safest choice is to simply embrace your hair's natural beauty, whatever that looks like for you.

And yes, that includes going gray.

Practical Swaps and Helpful Resources

In fact, gray hair has become so trendy that younger people are now dyeing their hair silver on purpose. Just search hashtag gray hair on Instagram and you'll see 20 and 30 somethings proudly rocking silver strands.

So if you're going gray naturally, you're actually ahead of the trend. That said, if you still want to color your hair, that's totally understandable and there are safer alternatives.

One option is henna, a natural plant based diet that's been used for centuries. It can be a great nontoxic choice, but it does have limitations. Its color range is narrow.

It can be messy and some products are mixed with PPD, the same harsh chemical found in conventional dyes. Always read labels carefully. Another option is a product called hair print, which isn't technically a dye.

It's a color restore made with a nontoxic, biocompatible ingredients. It was developed by a chemist who's lost his son to cancer, which he believed was linked to chemical exposures.

And that personal story led him to create something safer hair print works best for brown and black hair. And while the application can be a little messy, many users feel it's worth the effort.

And if you're looking into straightening your hair, the safest method is a mechanical like a flat iron, rather than chemical straighteners, which carry far more health risks.

Before we wrap up, I want to share a really helpful resource called clear. Yeah, it's a US based app and browser extension that scans product ingredient lists for potentially harmful chemicals and explains exactly what the concerns are.

Even if you're not familiar with the ingredient names, Clear Air does the detective work for you, making it so much easier to avoid questionable products and make safer choices with with confidence?

And that is the end. I will see you next week. Thank you for tuning in to Doctor Talks. We hope today's episode has enlightened and inspired you on your path to optimal health.

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