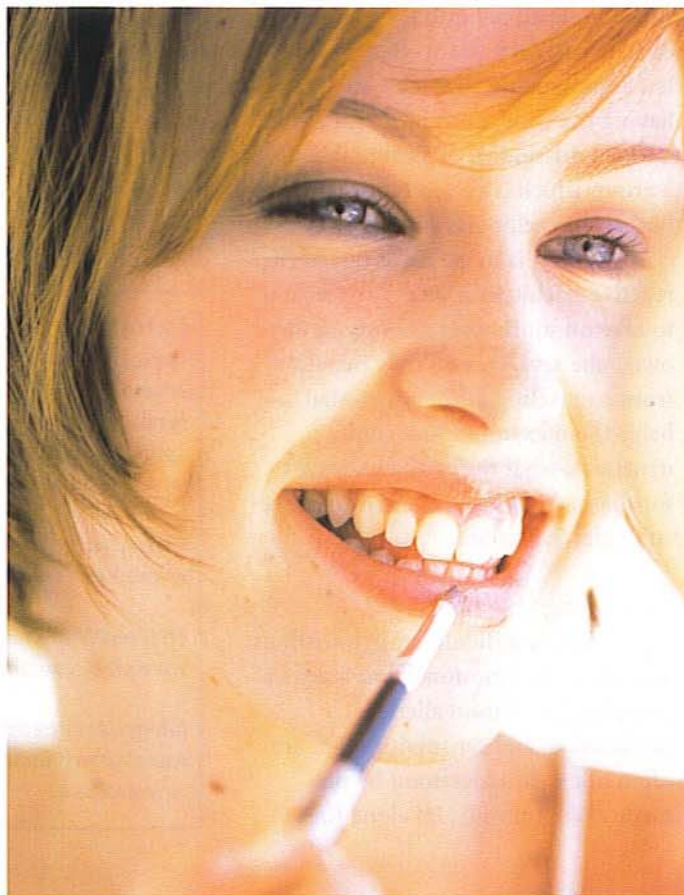


Sensitive Skin?

Call the Cosmetic Cop!



Living Without interviewed Paula Begoun, well-known Cosmetic Cop, for her advice on how to protect and nurture sensitive skin.

Living Without (LW) Are all-natural cosmetics the safest choice?

Paula Begoun (PB) Almost without exception, there are no such things as all-natural cosmetics. They don't exist.

LW Then what is a "natural" cosmetic?

PB The definition of "natural" is hazy and the term isn't regulated. It can mean anything and nothing, and each cosmetics company can use it to mean something different. There's no medical basis to describing a product as natural. "Natural" does not tell you anything about the efficacy of the ingredients in a product. For most cosmetics companies, it means including plant extracts in their formulations along with an array of synthetic ingredients.

Even if a truly "all-natural" product did exist, you wouldn't want to use it on your skin, at least not for very long.

Think about a bunch of plants, fruits or vegetables sitting in your refrigerator. What would happen if they didn't contain preservatives? In just a few days they'd become moldy and disgusting. In contrast, most skin-care products contain very "unnatural"-sounding preservatives, and that's great.

According to many cosmetics chemists, a reliable preservative system helps avoid the risk of microbial contamination, which could cause problems for the eyes, lips, and skin.

I'm not saying there aren't some natural ingredients that are exceptional for the skin, because there are — lots of them — but the idea that they are the best option or are still natural once they've been extracted from their source and mixed into a cosmetic is ludicrous.

LW But aren't natural ingredients better than synthetic?

PB Many natural ingredients can cause allergies, irritation and skin sensitivities. Look at poison ivy. Just think of how many people have a hay fever response to a wide variety of plants, and these plants often show up in cosmetics. Citrus often shows up in skin-care products, but most of us have gotten lemon on a slight cut while cooking and know it burns like crazy because it's irritating to skin. Hanging on to the notion that "natural" equals good skin care or a better makeup product will waste your money and probably hurt your skin.

Furthermore, the notion that natural ingredients are better than synthetic is even more distressing, because it just isn't true. While vegetable or plant oils may sound better for the skin, varying forms of silicones (i.e., siloxanes, dimethicones, cyclomethicones) are just as beneficial and offer impressive benefits for the skin. Silicones show up in over 80 percent of all skin-care, makeup, and hair-care products you buy. Yet you rarely hear about them because the cosmetics companies think consumers won't find them as sexy or alluring as plants, or oxygen therapy (which is actually a problem for healthy skin), or cellular repair, or a thousand other marketing angles that have nothing to do with what really works for your skin. It's hard to glamorize and advertise a synthetic, unnatural-sounding ingredient.

LW What about hypoallergenic products or those designed for sensitive skin?

PB "Hypoallergenic" and "designed for sensitive skin" are nonsense words that imply a product is unlikely to cause allergic reactions. Without firm standards, every company can make its own determination of what those words mean. The same goes for terms like "noncomedogenic," "dermatologist

tested" and "laboratory tested." There are no FDA regulations for the use of these terms and none for the claims that some cosmetics companies make about them. I've seen lots of products that claim to be "safer for sensitive skin," yet they contain problematic plants, fragrance, camphor, alcohol and a myriad of other ingredients that are known to cause skin reactions.

LW What ingredients should we watch out for?

PB Two ingredients almost universally added to cosmetics — fragrance and preservatives — are often thought to be the major culprits when our skin has an allergic or sensitizing reaction to a cosmetic. As lovely as essential oils sound, they're still nothing more than fragrance and they are notorious skin irritants. It's hard to avoid preservatives, because they are necessary to prevent the product from growing mold or bacteria.

These "natural" ingredients can cause skin irritation, allergic reactions, skin sensitivity and/or sun sensitivity: almond extract, allspice, angelica, arnica, balm mint oil, balsam, basil, bergamot, cinnamon, citrus, clove, clover blossom, cocoa butter, cornstarch, coriander oil, cottonseed oil, fennel, fir needle, geranium oil, grapefruit, horsetail, lavender oil, lemon, lemongrass, lime, marjoram, lemon balm, oak bark, papaya, peppermint, rose, sage, thyme, witch hazel, and wintergreen. The label might say "natural," but you could be buying a purely irritating product that might cause an allergic reaction.

Watch out for ingredients that make the skin really tingle a lot, like alcohol. I had severe eczema when I was young and acne later. I really pay attention when I try something new. I know I'm in trouble when my skin gets a tingling reaction. I can't tolerate Renova, Retin-A, vitamin A derivatives. Despite the



Mirror, Mirror

Stay beautiful. If your skin is reacting to a skin-care product, follow these tips from Paula Begoun.

Allergy or Skin Disorder?

Many skin conditions, such as psoriasis, rosacea, eczema, folliculitis (an inflammation of the hair follicle), and reactions to food can irritate the skin, making it look swollen, red, itchy, flaky or rashy. Check with your doctor to be sure you don't have a skin disorder.

Cause and Effect Find what products or ingredients are causing the problem and stop using them. This process can be very difficult because many skin reactions don't happen immediately. In addition, it may not be a single product but a combination of products that cause the problem. The key is to be patient and diligent, experimenting with the item and then watching how your skin responds when you discontinue using it.

Keep Clear Don't use other skin irritants over the affected area. Fragrances, scrubs, washcloths, AHAs, Retin-A, Renova, benzoyl peroxide, skin lighteners or other skin-care products with active or abrasive ingredients can trigger skin irritation. Avoid saunas, steam, sweating (if possible), or rubbing the affected area.

See an Expert Consult a physician if a reaction is serious or prolonged.

efficacy of these products, they can be irritating for lots of people.

In truth, for those with sensitive skin, any ingredient can cause anyone problems. You can get acne from iodine. Fluoride can cause blemishes around the mouth. It's rare but it happens.

LW What about those so-called pure ingredients that our grandmothers used to use?

PB Even if they were pure, they weren't all that great for skin. I wouldn't want to use the computer I used 20 years ago. Would you? What we know today about skin and state-of-the-art formularies and what makes skin behave in a healthy manner is mindboggling compared to what our grandmothers knew (or even what we knew 10 years ago). We know about antioxidants, about cell-communicating ingredients and intercellular substances

that mimic the structure of the skin. We can actually repair and restore skin, not just spread on an emollient.

LW Are there certain ingredients that are known to be safe for allergic skin?

PB I would love to give you a list of ingredients that I could guarantee won't cause your skin to have an allergic reaction, but there is no single ingredient or combination of ingredients that can live up to that sweeping claim.

LW How come?

PB Because everyone is different. Each of us has a unique chemical makeup, and the endless differences in the way our bodies perform are why we can react so differently when exposed to the same thing.

Keep in mind the amount of a suspect ingredient can also determine

how a product will affect your skin. The less there is of an ingredient (the farther down in the ingredient list it is), the less likely you are to have a reaction to it.

LW So there's no line of cosmetics that's best for sensitive or allergy-prone skin.

PB It would be great if there were, but it just doesn't exist. Allergic skin reactions are amazingly random and dissimilar. What you're sensitive to often has little to do with what someone else reacts to, and beyond that, there's the intricate interaction of ingredients being combined on the face. The culprit may not be the product you think. You may think a new moisturizer made your eyes swell, but it could be the resins from that reliable nail polish you were wearing in combination with the new moisturizer that triggered the problem.

It is truly impossible to know if, when, or how anyone's skin will react to any cosmetic because of the almost limitless combinations in all sorts of cosmetic formulations. Your only recourse is to keep experimenting until you find what works for you. Keep in mind that just because you've used a cosmetic for a long time doesn't mean you won't develop an allergic reaction to it.

If you have a tendency toward allergic reactions, pay close attention to what you use. My advice to anyone with allergy-prone skin is that you use as few products as you can, each with a short ingredient list, and experiment with one product at a time to see how your skin reacts.

LW Tell me about a typical allergic reaction.

PB Allergies can develop immediately or build over time, with each additional exposure to the ingredient. That's why some people develop an allergic reaction to a cosmetic that they were able to use for years. It's often difficult

to identify the culprit because you can develop an allergic reaction at any time or even find that you're no longer allergic to a substance you had problems with for years.

Reactions can be subtle, such as a little itching, minor redness and swelling, or small rash-like pimples. They can also involve a full-blown flare-up that causes intense, but temporary, discomfort and an unsightly appearance. Or a reaction can trigger a chronic condition requiring medical attention.

Whether or not a woman has sensitive or allergy-prone skin, chances are that at some point, she will have a sensitizing or allergic reaction to a cosmetic she's using.

LW And if there is a reaction?

PB Stop using the product immediately. Consult a physician if the reaction is serious or prolonged. Keep track of the ingredients to which you seem to be allergic so you're informed about what might cause you problems in the future. Don't hesitate to return the product and get your money back. Returning gives the cosmetics company essential information about how their formulas are working.

Before you try something new or different, wait until the reaction subsides. Pare down to the absolute basics. Start with naked skin, a good cleanser and a touch of moisturizer over very dry areas. Stay out of the sun.

It takes patience and experimentation to see what works. As you introduce a new product, listen to your skin, be cautious — and always err on the side of gentleness. **LW**

Paula Begoun has analyzed and critiqued skin-care formulations for over 25 years. Visit www.cosmeticcop.com for more information on cosmetics and skin care. While there, check out Begoun's top picks of the best beauty products created in 2005.