



Terry Gibb

# 'Hypoallergenic'? Not guaranteed

Q. I've been buying hypoallergenic cosmetics for my daughter. Are they worth the extra cost to prevent allergic reactions?

A. According to the Food and Drug Administration, the federal agency that oversees the safety and labeling of all cosmetics, being labeled "hypoallergenic" or "allergy-treated" does not guarantee that there's no chance of an allergic reaction when these products are used.

The prefix "hypo" in this usage means "less than." So, hypoallergenic on the label only means the product is less likely to cause an adverse reaction.

In addition, there are no standards on how a manufacturer determines when the product is hypoallergenic.

Hypoallergenic has a different meaning to different cosmetic manufacturers. For one, it may mean clinical testing has been done on the labeled products. To another manufacturer, it may mean only omitting fragrances or other problem-causing ingredients.

ANOTHER labeling misconception is "dermatologist tested." This important sounding phrase only means that a doctor has tested the product to see if it will cause any allergic problems in general.

However, that doesn't mean an individual won't react negatively to the product.

Another label claim to be aware of is "fragrance free" or "unscented." Fragrances are the number-one ingredient for causing allergic reactions.

These two phrases do not always mean that the product contains no fragrance. They may contain small amounts of fragrances to cover up other unpleasant odors, such as the fatty odor of soap or the smells in antiperspirants.

To be sure the product is truly "fragrance free," read the ingredients label on the back of the package — not just the claims on the front label.

TO REDUCE the chances of an allergic reaction, a product should always be tested on a small area on the forearm for 24 hours to see if a reaction occurs. If no reaction occurs after that time, the product should be safe to use.

If a reaction occurs during use when no reaction occurred in the patch test, stop using all cosmetic products until the reaction clears. This sudden reaction may be caused by one of two reasons:

1) You've built up a sensitivity to a regularly used product and testing each product individually should identify the guilty product.

2) Cross sensitization may have occurred. Cross sensitization involves closely related chemicals where a person sensitive to ingredient A may have an allergic reaction when chemically related ingredient B is applied.

Since the average consumer uses approximately 12 cosmetics at the same time, it may be difficult to sort out safe from unsafe products. And manufacturers are continuously reformulating cosmetics — so new ingredients may have been added to your regular cosmetics.

THE TOP FIVE product categories that cause reactions that most often are, according to FDA studies:

- Skin care products (lotions, creams, etc.).
- Hair preparations (including color).
- Facial makeup.
- Nail preparations (polish, remover, etc.).
- Fragrance products (perfume, colognes).

- AMONG COSMETICS, the top four ingredients to cause allergic reactions, the FDA says, are:
  - Fragrance ingredients.
  - Preservatives (antibacterial).
  - p-Phenylenediamine.
  - Lanolin and derivatives.

SUGGESTIONS that might prevent an allergic reaction:

1. Do a do-it-yourself patch test on all new products or old products advertising new ingredients or formulas.
2. Don't try more than one new product at a time.
3. Do a patch test a few days before professional hair treatments, such as permanents or coloring.
4. Read the labels on all new products. Avoid products with ingredients that have caused problems in the past.



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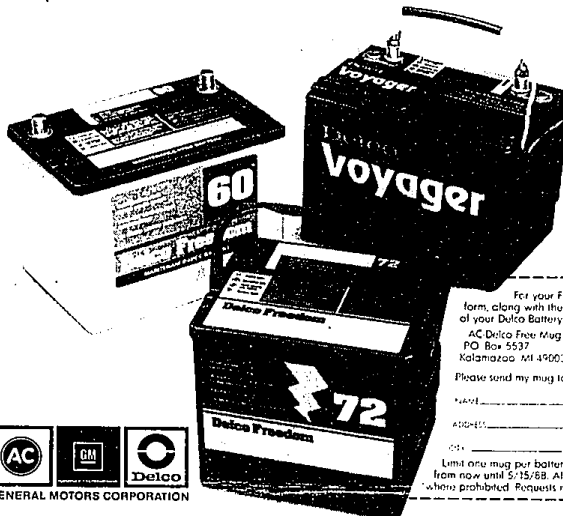
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