



Photo courtesy of Marks & Spencer

Organic Beauty

The ingredients in cosmetics are complicated because so is our skin. Finding what is actually good for our skin can be a minefield so Totally's beauty expert Shari Rendle gives us a few pointers:

Labelling

- **Unscented or Fragrance Free.** The product may contain small amounts of fragrances needed to cover the odour of other chemical ingredients.
- **Hypoallergenic** suggests that a product is less likely to cause an allergic reaction.
- **Dermatologically Tested.** This just means that the product has been tested by a dermatologist but the results may not have been scientifically valid or medically approved.
- **Natural** is misleading. It generally means the ingredients in the product are extracted from plants or animal products rather than produced chemically. Manufacturers can use the term even if the natural ingredient is only a minimal part. Also natural doesn't always mean better. Some botanical extracts including mints and citrus can be irritating yet their synthetic counterparts can be far more effective.
- **Alcohol Free** normally means that the product doesn't contain drying alcohols like ethyl (grain), benzyl or methyl alcohols.

Problem Ingredients

- **Alcohol** – See above

- **Synthetic Fragrance.** The synthetic fragrances used in cosmetics can have as many as 200 ingredients. There is no way of knowing what these are as the label will just say 'fragrance'. They can be responsible for skin irritation, headaches, rashes and in some cases can cause memory impairment. Alternatives such as essential oils and natural fragrances can still hold problems for fragrance-sensitive people.

- **Isopropyl Myristate** is an additive that gives cosmetics a silky, sheer feel. It is also used as a mechanical lubricant. On the skin it can creep into follicles and cause irritation and congestion.

- **Lanolin** is an oil extracted from sheep's wool and is a common additive in cosmetics. It can cause little blockages beneath the skin's surface called *milia*. Its smell isn't pleasant and is generally covered up with synthetic fragrance.

- **Mineral Oil** is a by-product of petroleum manufacture. It forms a good barrier but doesn't allow the skin to breathe or get rid of toxins. Can cause milia around the eyes and mouth.

Alternatives to Isopropyl Myristate, Lanolin and Mineral Oils are: plant oils (except coconut), kalaya oil, vegetable glycerine, propylene glycol, polyethylene glycol and butylene glycol.

- **Petrolatum** is a refined form of mineral oil and is the basis of petroleum jelly. It's a good barrier but can cause oversensitivity to sunlight, slow down the skin's functioning ability and cause congestion (milia).

- **Paraffin Wax** is often used in moisturisers. If low grade it may contain harmful and toxic oils and impurities.

Alternatives to petrolatum and paraffin wax are: Beeswax, jojoba oil, carnauba wax and candelilla wax.

Active ingredients

Expensive doesn't always mean good. What you are paying for (apart from gorgeous packaging) should be a higher concentration of the active ingredients (that do more than cleanse or moisturise).

Here follows some of the many active ingredients:

AHAs (Alpha Hydroxy Acids)/BHAs (Beta Hydroxy Acids) or Salicylic Acid/Papain Enzymes

These work to exfoliate the skin and speed up the skin's renewal process. They can be used to improve the appearance of fine lines, pigmentation and acne and they can increase the tone, texture, smoothness and softness of the skin.

- **AHAs** work from the inside out. They dissolve the 'glue' that holds the dead skin cells together. These naturally occurring acids, such as lactic, glycolic, citric and malic, are derived from the sugars in particular plants. Common acids occur naturally in milk, sugar cane, citrus fruits and apples. It is not advisable to sunbathe for two weeks after using AHAs and after this time factor 30 is advisable.

- **BHAs** work from the outside in. Salicylic acid is a naturally occurring acid derived from willow bark, wintergreen leaves and sweet birch bark. It is also one of the main ingredients in aspirin. It is attracted to oily skin follicles and has antibacterial properties and so can cut through oil to treat acne. BHAs are slightly less irritating to sensitive skins than AHAs.

- **L-ascorbic acid (vitamin C)** is a known antioxidant therefore a skin protector against free radical damage. It also stimulates the production of collagen.

- **Papain and Bromelain Enzymes** come from papaya and pineapple fruits respectively. They work in the same ways as AHAs by dissolving the skin glue that holds the dead skin cells together. They are good on sensitive skin because they are non-abrasive.

Panthenol (vitamin B5) and Retinol (vitamin A) both stimulate the production of collagen and elastin.

- **Retinol** can lighten brown discolouration by increasing exfoliation and skin cell renewal. It can hydrate, tone and smooth the skin resulting in younger looking skin. The skin goes through its own natural repair programme at night therefore this is the best time to use retinol products.

Retinol has been known to cause redness, tingling and irritation in sensitive skins so be careful. Also, as with AHAs, do not sunbathe directly after using retinol as the sun can irritate areas that have been treated with it.

- **Tochopherol (vitamin E)** A natural humectant that can help to smooth the skin and repair natural barrier function.

- **Vitamin C and vitamin E** work in partnership, protecting each other from free radical damage.

For questions about any ingredients you are unsure about call The (very helpful) International Dermal Institute on 01372 363600.

Visit their website: www.dermalinstitute.com



or try Ruth Winter - A Consumer's Dictionary Of Cosmetic Ingredients: Complete Information About The Harmful And Desirable Ingredients Found In Cosmetics And Cosmeceuticals.

Shari Rendle

RECOMMENDED PRODUCTS...

Finding the right cosmetics to suit your skin can take a lot of research. Personally I think the following brands are excellent for happy, calm, and glowing beauty:



Jane Iredale's make-up uses inert mineral pigments instead of synthetic colours and is free from perfumes, fillers, parabens and artificial preservatives. It also contains chemical free UVA and UVB protection. So it's great for sensitive skins, stays on for a long time and the range and colours are extensive. www.janeiredale.com



Dr Hauschka is free from synthetic preservatives and fragrances and is made from natural raw materials including plant oils, waxes, medicinal plant extracts and essential oils (again please note that some people are sensitive to some essential oils). The highest quality organic fairtrade ingredients are used. Dr Hauschka is available nationwide at John Lewis, Fresh & Wild, Space N.K, Planet Organic and at www.drhauschka.co.uk

Dermologica is researched and developed by The International Dermal Institute. It refuses to use artificial colours, synthetic fragrances, S.D. alcohol, lanolin or mineral oil – all of which were industry favourites due to their low cost, despite links to numerous skin problems that were well understood. Dermologica doesn't have fancy packaging but concentrates on skin care education and formulating products that deliver results, not ridiculous claims. I have used it for years. www.dermologica.co.uk



JASON produces only pure, carefully balanced products that contain the highest quality, naturally sourced ingredients, known to be skin compatible and proven effective. They contain the finest food-grade, natural, organic and nutritional ingredients for the hair and skin. I really like their rosewater and aloe shampoos. www.jason-natural.com

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