

I have to admit that I like a good cut, soft shiny hair, and yummy smelling shampoo and conditioner. It's the yummy smelling shampoo that tends to get me into trouble, as it's the fragrance of a product that is often the reason we are at risk of long-term health problems.

In fact, there is so much to avoid that that Health Canada has a 22 page document listing chemicals that are either restricted or prohibited.

Although the Canadian government requires ingredient labeling, in which ingredients must be labeled in "descending order of predominance" there are some exceptions to that. Colouring agents, fragrance and flavour or aroma do not follow these guidelines. Colouring agents can be listed in random order at the end of the list no matter their concentration. Ingredients that either add or mask scent do not need to be listed as long as the word fragrance is listed.

So what? It smells pretty

The ingredients hidden behind the word 'fragrance' may be **causing long-term health problems such as cancer**.

However, under our current system ingredients are acceptable as long as they have not been proven to cause problems. So until they are proven harmful they will continue to find their way into the 10 or so personal care products that you use everyday.

Unfortunately, testing focuses mostly on short term issues such as skin irritation or harm to the eyes. While this is important, we should also be looking at the **long-term effects of some of these ingredients**. The big one you hear a lot about these days is phthalates, which is used to prolong the life of scent and colour in personal care products. In studies in animals, it has been shown to cause **birth defects in the male reproductive system**.

However, in Canada, phthalates can still be used in personal care products because there is no definitive scientific proof that phthalates affect the human male reproductive system. In Europe on the other hand, the EU works on the **precautionary principle**, which states that **if there is some evidence of harm, then an ingredient should not be used**.

Phthalates have been removed and products have been reformulated to use safer alternatives.

What to buy?

Here are some keys of what to look for

1. If you can't pronounce it, that is a problem. Look for companies that list **ingredients that you can pronounce and understand**

. Phthalates is pronounced THA-lates.

2. Do they use **words such as fragrance, perfum, or aroma** in the ingredients? If they do, that is a warning sign to stay away.

3. Is the company willing to put their **ingredients on their website or send them along in an email**

. Do they have a page that helps you understand what ingredients they use and why? Or do you have to stand in the aisle with your arm outstretched trying to read the fine print ingredients?

Good thing is, we've done some of the work for you. Find the best eco-friendly non toxic at [Ethical Consumer Beauty and Cosmetics](#)

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