

Activity: Personal Care Products

Purpose:

This is a hands-on activity that allows the participants to make and take home a personal care product. It is similar to the *Clean and Green* workshop (see Clean and Green handout and the *Strategies Manual* p.41) where participants make cleaning products. Through this activity, participants learn about common ingredients in personal care products including baby products, ways to find more information and safer alternatives. The potential health impacts of personal care products have generated quite a media buzz in the past few years but it remains an area of large uncertainty and controversy. While Canadian regulations has been improved with new labelling requirements and expanded ingredient hot list, precautionary measures are advisable particularly around products used by pregnant and breastfeeding women and baby products.

Props

1. Some typical mom and baby products.
2. Ingredients to make one or two personal care or baby products.
3. Health Canada's Cosmetic Ingredient Hot List.
4. 12 ingredients to avoid in personal care products wallet card by the Green Guide.
5. Printed examples from the Skin Deep database or if possible access on-line.

Some discussion-starter questions and activities for the group:

- What are the typical products a new mom may use on her and her baby's skin? Make a list and/or ask participants to volunteer to bring their own.
- Would you expect these products to contain chemicals that are potentially toxic? What kind of health impacts would you expect from personal care product chemicals?
- Check ingredient lists on product labels against the 12 ingredients to avoid on the wallet card.
- Compare the US-based wallet card with the Canadian ingredient hot list.
- Search for products or chemicals found in ingredient lists on product labels in the Skin Deep database www.cosmeticsdatabase.com/index.php
- Make one or more baby or personal care products from the list of recipes attached.
- Discuss how this activity can be adapted for men or teenagers.

Key take-away messages:

1. Our skin is our largest organ. Many medications (contraception, nicotine, pain killers) are now administered through skin patches illustrating our skin's ability to absorb and deliver chemicals to our blood stream.
2. Babies' skin is thinner and more able to absorb substances it comes into contact.
3. For babies: Use plain warm water and a very mild soap, when needed, and only where necessary. Babies' skin contains natural oils which can be removed if washed too often and cause the skin to become dry and irritated. Some dermatologists suggest bathing a baby only once or twice a week and cleaning dirty body parts like bums, faces and hands as needed. A mild soap can also replace baby shampoos (most have strong detergents and scents that should be avoided).
4. Talc powder should be avoided. If needed, it can be replaced by less toxic products such as cornstarch, rice starch or arrowroot powder. Use any powder with caution, it can irritate the respiratory system.
5. Reduce your use of products, use products with fewer and less toxic ingredients.
6. Avoid products that contain ingredients known or suspected to have health impacts.
7. While the quantities in each personal care product may be small, they combine with all of our other exposures. A person uses on average 7 to 9 personal care products which add up to over 100 unique "ingredients".

8. In Canada, around 500 chemicals are regulated in personal care products. In the United States, only 9 while the European Union lists over 1000 ingredients in its Cosmetics Directive.

For more information about personal care products, see:

- The Green Guide www.thegreenguide.com
- Guide to Less Toxic Products www.lesstoxicguide.ca
- The Safe Cosmetics Campaign www.safecosmetics.org To expand this activity into a healthy cosmetics spa party, see their kit for more details www.safecosmetics.org/action/housepartsy.cfm
- Environmental Working Group Skin Deep Database www.cosmeticsdatabase.com/index.php
- Health Canada's Cosmetic Ingredient "Hotlist"
http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/cps-spc/person/cosmet/info-ind-prof/_hot-list-critique/prohibited-eng.php

Any products mentioned in this activity is used simply to provide examples. Ingredients of concern are used in many common products.

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Homemade Alternatives for Baby and Personal Care Products

This collection of recipes was gathered from various sources on the internet. When searching for this type information, be careful and evaluate the trustworthiness of the sources you use. A “natural” or homemade product is not necessarily a safe product. While good intentions may be the incentive for a search for safer alternatives, untested recommendations and poorly researched information is widely available on the internet. Double and triple-check and if unsure, consult a physician.

Babies' skin is most permeable in the first six months; avoid unnecessary exposure to chemicals found in baby and personal care products whether on store shelf or homemade. For babies younger than six months, plain warm water and a mild soap is sufficient unless recommended by a doctor or health professional. Do not use essential oils on babies younger than 6 months, while pregnant or breastfeeding. Some essential oils can be toxic.

Better Baby Oil

1 cup grapeseed, almond, apricot, sunflower or olive oil
2-3 capsules vitamin E (optional)

Cut open or pierce the vitamin E capsules, and squeeze the vitamin E oil into the base oil. Stir or shake the oils until they are combined. Use as needed in the bath, as a lotion, or massage oil.

Calendula Baby Oil

8 ounces of oil (olive, almond, apricot, or sunflower)
1 ounce calendula flowers

Place the oil and calendula flowers in a crock pot on low temperature for about 4 hours. Be careful that the oil does not get too hot! Allow the oil to cool and then strain it using cheese cloth or a gauze diaper.

Smoothing Skin Lotion

1 tsp. honey
1 tsp. vegetable or olive oil
¼ tsp. lemon.

Mix all ingredients. Rub into hands, elbows, heels and anywhere that feels dry. Leave on for 10 minutes. Rinse off with water.

Moisturizing Milk Bath

1 cup dried cow or goat milk (if you are allergic to milk this may not be suitable to you)
½ cup cornstarch
2-3 drops lavender or chamomile essential oils (optional, not recommended for young children)

Combine all ingredients and stir. To use: sprinkle a small amount in a warm bath.

NOT RECOMMENDED!!!

This is an example of the type of information widely available on the internet that you need to be cautious about.

Baby Oil for bloating and colic

2 ½ tbsp. sweet almond oil
3 drops * ginger essential oil
3 drops * chamomile essential oil
2 tsp. ** St. John's-Wort oil

Mix all of the ingredients in a dark bottle with a dropper top, which will help to preserve the oil and prevent bacteria from forming. Shake well before each use. The baby oil will keep for about 6 months. Apply a thin layer of baby oil to the infant's feet after bathing. Gently massage the oil up the legs and over the body. Small circular strokes on the abdomen are soothing and stimulate digestion.

WARNING ABOUT ESSENTIAL OILS:

* Essential oils are not recommended for use on babies, or pregnant and breastfeeding women unless on the advice of a physician or health professional. People suffering from high blood pressure, epilepsy, liver damage, or any medical condition should also consult a health professional prior to using these highly concentrated plant extracts.

Essential oils can be inhaled and affect the respiratory system and the brain or absorbed through the skin and into the blood stream. Research on the health impacts of essential oils is limited and hence, they should be used with caution. As with any strong scents, essential oils can irritate the respiratory system and should not be used around babies with developing lungs.

** Health Canada recommends avoiding the use of St. John's-Wort during pregnancy and breastfeeding (see www.hc-sc.gc.ca/dhp-mpps/prodnatur/applications/licen-prod/monograph/mono_stjohnswort-millepertuis_e.html).

These ingredients are also used in various commercial products (massage oil, facial cleansers, moisturizers, even baby lotions and diaper creams), read the labels! On commercial products, St. John's-Wort is often listed as *Hypericum perforatum*, its latin name.

For more information:

See information on the *Natural Health Products Regulations* which came into effect on January 1, 2004 at http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/dhp-mpps/prodnatur/index_e.html

The regulations cover the way products are manufactured and brought to market, and the information that is on the label. Natural health products that have been approved will either have a Natural Product Number (NPN) or Drug Identification Number-Homeopathic Medicine (DIN-HM) on the label. A NPN or DIN-HM will show the consumer that the product has undergone and passed a review of its formulation, labeling and instructions for use.