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The Cosmetic, Toiletry and Perfumery Association

Parabens

Parabens are a class of substances widely used as preservatives in cosmetics, foods, pharmaceuticals and other household products. They keep products free from bacteria, moulds and fungi that would otherwise spoil the product and could cause real harm to the user.

The family of parabens, which are found naturally in plants and animals as well as being man-made, are approved for use as preservatives in the European Cosmetics Directive, and have been endorsed by the competent authorities of all member states. They are among the most widely used of preservatives, having been in use for more than fifty years with an excellent safety record.

Sadly there is a lot of misinformation about parabens, including allegations that they are linked to cancer. In fact, they are not a cause of cancer of any kind. A widely repeated allegation. Parabens are non-toxic to human cells. This is because our own skin cells rapidly and easily break parabens down into harmless smaller pieces. This means they are not able to cause harm and do not lead to skin sensitisation. It also means they won't persist in the environment or harm wildlife in any way. None of the extensive research carried out on the parabens has indicated a potential risk of harm to human health and parabens remain amongst the safest of preservatives in today's cosmetic products.

Parabens in underarm cosmetics

There have been many reports questioning the safety of parabens. They repeat a discredited theory concerning parabens, underarm cosmetics and links to breast cancer.

In fact, the European Commission's own committee of independent experts, the Scientific Committee for Consumer Products (SCCP) now known as the Scientific Committee for Consumer Safety (SCCS), has issued an official statement on parabens' safety. In it, the committee confirms that there is no evidence of any risk of breast cancer caused by the use of underarm cosmetics, including those that contain parabens.

To read the SCCP opinion on parabens safety, visit the website archive of the SCCP.

It must be stated that, in general, over 90% of underarm cosmetics (antiperspirants and deodorants) do not require preservatives, parabens or otherwise, owing to their formulation and the way they are packaged.

The family of ingredients known as parabens are approved for use as preservatives in the Cosmetics Directive, the European law that regulates the safety of cosmetic products. They are among the most widely used preservatives, having been in use for more than fifty years with an excellent safety record.

Parabens in cosmetics

The safety of all cosmetic products and their ingredients is governed by strict European laws. As well as this, cosmetic ingredients and their safety are kept under constant review by the European Commission and Member States, assisted by the SCCS. The committee has, in 2010 and 2011, confirmed the safety of four parabens used in cosmetics. For other, less used parabens, the SCCS found insufficient data to set a safe limit and additional data were not generated in their support.

To read the SCCS opinions visit the SCCS website.

An easy to ready summary of the opinions is also available from the European Commission.

Hot fact...

The CTPA has been providing schools with science-based educational resources using the cosmetics industry and its products as stimulus since 1993.

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