



Skin Smart

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Reading Labels, Made Easy

When you pick up your skin care products and read the label does any of it make sense to you?

A good place to start with being a confident label reader is to look at the longevity of the product. The Open-Jar symbol was adopted in Europe in February 2003 and has been progressively appearing on the labels of cosmetic products. The PAO (Period After Opening) shows the number of months a product can be used before needing to be discarded.

The PAO of products varies greatly; organic, preservative free products often have a PAO of between 3 to 6 months whereas the vast majority of skin care products containing preservatives fall between 12 to 24 months.

In addition to the PAO, in all Over-The-Counter (OTC) Drug formulations, such as sunscreens and anti-bacterial acne products you will see a printed expiration date which indicates how long the Active Ingredient(s), such as sunscreens, remain "active or potent" before needing to be discarded. This is irrespective of whether the product has been opened or not. If a product is opened and it has a 12 month recommended PAO, yet the expiry date extends this time frame, you would follow the PAO as the guide to when to discard the product.

When reading an ingredients label on a skin care product, it may be handy to have a degree in cosmetic science if you wish to understand and pronounce each one! Unrecognisable names are often found in products we know and love, and the reason very little makes sense to the consumer is because all cosmetic products must list the INCI ingredient (International Nomenclature of Cosmetic Ingredients) name. This is the internationally recognised name by chemists the world over. Botanical ingredients are listed using their genus, species, common name, plant part e.g. Citrus Aurantium Dulcis is actually Orange Peel Extract.

When reading a label, the ingredients with concentrations of 1% or more are all listed in descending order of use. The ingredients used in concentrations of less than 1% can be listed in any order. This may seem a little strange but this means the formulation can be protected from being replicated easily. There is no requirement to list the quantity or percentage of the majority of ingredients.

Skin care product categories such as natural, organic and cosmeceutical products are extremely difficult to regulate. Poor regulation means that marketing-hype and label literature can be misleading. The term 'natural' as an example; what does it really mean? That it contains no chemicals? The (un-regulated) term refers to a product requiring 1% of the ingredients to be natural. In regards

to organic products, there are certainly some authentic organic products in the marketplace but once again this poorly regulated area means there are also some that are not compliant. My advice would be to do your homework on the company and the certification before purchase if organic's your bag.

We hear the word cosmeceuticals banded around frequently. This term is not an official term recognised or used by government legislating bodies such as the FDA, but rather one created by marketing in the cosmetic arena. The definition widely agreed upon of a cosmeceutical is 'a cosmetic product containing actives which affect the structure and function of the skin and/or are formulated to treat/prevent disease or specific skin conditions'. Cosmeceuticals could also be called special-effect ingredients as they help to radically improve the appearance of the skin. Examples are humectants, AHA's and sunscreens.



Look out for these result focused, high performance ingredients which promote a healthy, vibrant skin:

Retinyl Palmitate (Retinol/Vitamin A): Helps reverse the signs of premature ageing while stimulating collagen and elastin synthesis to increase elasticity, strengthen and firm skin.

Magnesium Ascorbyl Phosphate: A non-acidic skin conditioning agent, stable form of Vitamin C linked to collagen formation whilst providing antioxidant protection. Inhibits (melanin formation) pigmentation and MMP (Matrix Metalloproteinase) enzymes that contribute to collagen degradation.

Tocopheryl Acetate (Vitamin E): Improves the barrier function and smoothness of the skin. An excellent antioxidant which defends against Reactive Oxygen Species (ROS).

Glucosamine HCl: A glycosaminoglycan which fights AGEs (Advanced Glycation End Products) and stimulates cell sloughing as well as Hyaluronic Acid and collagen formation in skin.

Palmitoyl Pentapeptide-3 and Oligopentapeptide: Synthetic protein and peptides act as cellular messengers to stimulate collagen synthesis. They work similarly to Retinol and Vitamin C. They help skin re-structure the extracellular matrix.

Palmitoyl Tetrapeptide-7: A synthetic peptide complex that acts as a cellular messenger to stimulate collagen and Hyaluronic Acid to increase skin elasticity and tone.

Camellia Sinensis Leaf Extract (White and Green Tea): A powerful antioxidant which protects against ROS (Reactive Oxygen Species/free radicals), fights the formation of AGEs in skin and inhibits MMPs.

Glycyrrhiza Glabra Extract (Licorice): A very versatile ingredient which is not only a powerful antioxidant being rich in polyphenols but also an excellent ingredient for treating hyper-pigmentation as it inhibits melanin biosynthesis.

Hyaluronic Acid: If you are seeking a high performance product that really works on dehydration, then choose one that contains Hyaluronic Acid. It has the ability to hold 1000 times its own weight in moisture and it binds the moisture to the skin.

Yeast Extract: A rich source of Beta Glucan - an immune stimulant for the skin which helps stimulate wound healing, collagen formation and increases oxygen utilisation in skin.

Hydroxy Acids (HA's): The top performers are Salicylic Acid, not only a great ingredient for exfoliation and removing congestion and plugs of sebum (blackheads), but also has the added benefit of hydrating the skin. Lactic Acid is an excellent exfoliant which is less irritating than Glycolic and has an added benefit of combating hyper-pigmentation.

Look out for these result focused, high performance ingredients which combat breakouts:

Nordihydroguaiaretic Acid, Niacinamide, Zinc Gluconate and Sarcosine: All are excellent sebum/oil regulating ingredients.

Benzoyl Peroxide, Tea Tree Oil, Zinc Gluconate and Sulfate, Sulfur, Balm Mint and Rosemary Extract: Antibacterial ingredients that help in the treatment of inflamed spots/lesions.

Green Tea, Panthenol (Vitamin B5), Camphor, Coneflower, Oat Extract: Excellent anti-inflammatory ingredients which reduce sensitivity and soothe the skin.



Finally, if you suffer from Coeliac Disease and you worry about gluten in skin care products according to the Coeliac Society "gluten molecules are too large to be absorbed through the skin. If you're having a reaction to a personal care product (for example, a moisturiser or a sunscreen lotion) that contains gluten, you may be allergic to one or more of the other ingredients".

I hope this simple guide to label reading helps empower your decision making process when purchasing your next skin care product.

Just as important as the ingredients to look out for are the ones to avoid:

Artificial colours e.g. D & C Coal Tar dyes: Can cause breakouts and sensitivity. It is best to avoid them in your skin care products if you can, after all they have no skin benefit.

Artificial fragrance: Is recognised as a common sensitising agent, in addition some artificial fragrances also react with sun light (photo sensitive) leading to hyper-pigmentation.

Comedogenic ingredients: There are ingredients that are known to cause congestion in the follicle (blackheads) and should be avoided e.g. Acetylated Lanolin, Butyl Stearate, Cocoa Butter, Flax Oil, Isoparaffin C9-11, Isopropyl Myristate, Linseed Oil, Myristyl Myristate, Myreth-3 Myristate, Octyl Palmitate, Octyl Stearate. Always look for the term 'non-comedogenic' when purchasing your skin care.