

Busted! The Most Common Skin Product Myths, Debunked

Annet King

As Dermalogica's in-house skin care guru (oh, and their Director of Global Education), Annet King is an invaluable trove of beauty know-how. Luckily, she's letting us pick her brain on everything from hyperpigmentation to the best supplements for your visage. Prepare to get schooled.

It's no surprise that we're all a lot more conscious about what we put in and on our body. And, while it's great to be more conscious of what products you choose, it's easy to take this to the extreme when it comes to diet and ingredients in skin products. Here in Los Angeles, I meet many people who love using Botox, but wouldn't dare eat something that wasn't organic...but I digress. Choosing to believe every miracle claim, or scary, fear-mongering morsel of news is just plain silly, yet many don't realize that these stories may lack legitimate scientific backing, or didn't involve actual humans in a realistic scenario.

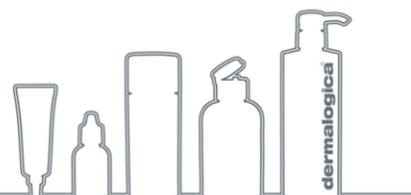
So, how do you separate all the hype and hullabaloo from the real facts when it comes to understanding what goes into your favorite moisturizer? How can you tell from a product's label whether something is safe or likely to slowly poison you due to its mercury content? (I wish I was joking). Joining me in this feature is Dermalogica's VP of Research and Development, Dr. Diana Howard, who will help me debunk some of the biggest myths out there to help you better understand the marketplace.

Myth 1: My products are natural, so they must be safe!

FALSE: The term "natural" implies that a product has been made solely from botanical resources without any use of chemical additives. Sadly, because there is no regulation of natural products, the term is used very loosely and misleads the average shopper. So-called "natural" products only need to contain 1% natural ingredients (i.e. water) to earn their description, so the term is actually meaningless. That bright pink guava-scented lotion you buy at the drugstore could be far from pure and natural! Natural isn't necessarily better, when you consider that a Peptide is synthetically made in a lab, but Pseudomonas bacteria, mold, Poison Ivy, and petroleum are all considered natural ingredients. Which would you rather put on your skin?

Myth 2: My product has been clinically tested, it must be good!

FALSE: Was the study performed on real people? In a test tube? Was the study on the finished product or on an ingredient in the product? A good clinical study is published in a scientific journal and undergoes a rigorous peer review process. Most sound clinical studies are not backed or sponsored by cosmetic companies, although some can be. Other claims, like "30% improvement" or "80% of testers felt their skin was smoother" is typically under the umbrella of marketing claims. If the test group never used a moisturizer before, of course their skin felt better! My suggestion for when you're selecting a new product is to get a sample, try it, and look for an improvement in your own skin before you commit.



Myth 3: I need to dump my sunscreen as soon as it's expired.

FALSE: If sunscreens have expired, there's a good chance they are still good for another year, but just like prescription drugs, the pharmacist would tell you to toss them. Keep this in mind if you have sensitive skin and burn easily; once you reach that date, there is no guarantee the level of activity is still present. Dr. Diana has this to say: "In my 30 years in this industry, I have never had a solar product not pass the three-year actual time test. So, these products may only have a two-year expiration date stamped on them, but they are, in actuality, good for another year. I would not hesitate to use an SPF product that is a year beyond its expiration date. After that, toss it!"

Myth 4: Ingredients that are listed first on the label means they are used in a higher concentration

TRUE *and* FALSE: Ingredient listing was originally added to cosmetics (including skin care) so that someone allergic to a specific ingredient could see if it was in the product and steer clear of it. Today, consumers are savvier about ingredients and look to the listing to see what exactly is in the formula. According to Dr. Diana, "What consumers don't realize is that the ingredient listing doesn't really reveal that much about the concentration of ingredients in a formula. Regulations require that ingredients be in descending order but only until you reach the 1% mark. For anything below 1% mark, it is up to the manufacturer how they choose to list the ingredients. Often, this 1% mark comes after the first five or six ingredients, which means that any ingredient after half a dozen or so are usually in very low concentration. The consumer has no way of knowing this!"

So, there you have it: a quick glimpse into some of the most commonly heard myths in the skin care biz. Have you heard something that needs debunking? Feel free to Tweet me @annetking and I'll get to the bottom of it for you!

