

THE GOOD & BAD OF SKIN CARE: Necessary Ingredients

by Shannon Esau, CEO & national educator for RA Skin Care

There are many mixed messages out there about certain skin care ingredients. While there are certainly some ingredients that have unanimously been deemed bad, there are others that have undeservingly earned a bad rap.

Ingredients like alcohol, laureth, and glycerin are just a few examples. However, when it comes to whether these are truly bad by definition, the answer is not as clear cut. In many cases, it depends on the percentage, source, and overall formula.

ALCOHOL

Alcohols in skin care products are commonly thought to deplete skin hydration, the healthy oils that protect skin, and ultimately damage skin's barrier. While some do, there are others that can deliver benefits to certain skin types. Certain fatty alcohols derived from palm or coconut oil can nourish skin and support transdermal delivery of other ingredients. Cetyl alcohol, cetearyl alcohol, and propylene glycol are a couple examples.

Similarly, cetearyl alcohol, which is a combination of cetyl and stearyl alcohol, supports hydration and softens skin. Propylene glycol, also an organic compound, is a humectant that can increase moisture retention as well as enhance the penetration of other active ingredients, making the formulation more effective. Propylene glycol is often confused with ethylene glycol, which explains the negative connotations.

Denatured alcohol or alcohol denat is much debated in skin care, as there are certainly some drawbacks to this ingredient when it is not used properly. However, when it is, the ingredient becomes a wonderful solvent. It can also support absorption of other ingredients, works ideally in a toner, and is antimicrobial. Naturally, if denatured alcohol is the primary ingredient in a formulation or not balanced, it can strip skin of hydration.

LAURETH

Laureths are commonly used as emulsifiers and surfactants in products. There is a wide range of laureths used in products including laureth-2, laureth-4, laureth-7, laureth-23,

sodium laureth sulfate, and so on. Adding to the confusion is the similarly named lauryl and lauroyl ingredients.

Much of the debate about laureths has centered around sodium laureth sulfate and sodium lauryl sulfate. While neither is inherently bad, it all depends on how they are manufactured. Certain practices can add contaminants such as ethylene oxide and 1,4-dioxane, which should be avoided. Another laureth to avoid is laureth-4. It is a known polyethylene glycol (PEG) which is a type of plastic that has been linked to undesirable side effects.

GLYCERIN

Glycerin has stirred up debate and for good reason. Some varieties can be harmful and have adverse effects on skin. The ones to be avoided are those derived from animal fats, petroleum blends, and the synthetic forms produced from epichlorohydrin. When the plant-derived variety is used, it is extremely beneficial as a humectant.

Naturally, there are ingredients that should be avoided – fragrances, synthetic vitamin E, parabens, PEGs, and so on. Some of those that have been deemed bad may be a result of greenwashing or partial information. There is typically more than meets the eye, requiring additional investigation into the entire ingredient deck, how the ingredient was sourced, and ultimately, if it will work with a client's specific skin type. ▽



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