



Good, the bad . . . and the ugly

Women don't want to know about the toxins they are slathering on their skin but the repercussions might soon be written all over their face, writes
Genevieve Morton

THE average Tasmanian woman spends 450 days applying her make up in a lifetime. She will swallow almost a kilo of lipstick from the age of 16 to 60 and every year she will absorb an estimated two kilograms of chemicals through cosmetics and skin-care products. Chemicals found in lipstick, moisturisers and hair dyes are increasingly linked with tumours, cell mutation, allergies, infertility and cancer. British author, ethical stylist and reiki practitioner Dawn Mellowship makes the startling claims in her book *Toxic Beauty* — out next week — and speaks of women all over the world waking up to the dangers lurking in most bathroom cabinets. She says most perfume and preservative-heavy moisturisers also dehydrate and age the skin, encouraging women to use more. And while many women understand the risks in using toxic products from big-name companies, they continue to use their

products. Why? It's a question shared by Tasmanian natural skin care companies such as Beauty & The Bees and House of Herbs. Glossy advertising campaigns and deceptive "natural" ingredients are to blame, says Beauty & The Bees founder Jill Saunders in Hobart. "The big-name companies spend \$400 million annually on advertising world-wide, luring women in with supposed miracle formulas," she says. "But Tassie women are coming around to what's real and what really works, especially younger women who are sick of products saying they are natural when they simply aren't." Ms Mellowship agrees. The biggest misconception in natural skin care — currently a booming market because of the risks — is over whether ingredients are what they are said to be. "Claims that products are sodium lauryl sulphate free, petrochemical free, paraben free and so on do not necessarily indicate that these products are completely free of synthetic chemicals, simply that they have chosen to eliminate the specific synthetic compounds mentioned," Ms Mellowship says. A product may claim to have a natural or organic ingredient but it might be a token gesture in the ingredients list or a watery herbal infusion in a "chemical soup", she says. At City Organics in Hobart, Brett Stephens says demand for natural skin-care and toxin-free mineral make-up has never been greater. But read the labels carefully. "It is a minefield area because as far as the word 'organic' goes in cosmetics, it's not tightly regulated," he says. "My advice is to go straight to the

website cosmeticdatabase.com and check up on the product and read its rating before you buy." Founder of House of Herbs and Tasmanian Organics Peter Blythe said ingredients must be 95 per cent organic content and 5 per cent allowable input to be certified organic. "There are companies out there who release a product with 75 per cent organic but 25 per cent of terrible components," he says. The nasties to look for are propyl-glycol (anti-freeze agents), paraben preservatives (which are carcinogenic) and fragrances — or parfum — in the ingredients. "All fragrances are made up of about 500 toxic chemicals," Blythe says, adding consumers are finally becoming aware of what is good for them and when they are being conned by big-name companies. US pressure group the Campaign for Safe Cosmetics claimed victory in 2005 after L'Oreal, Revlon and Unilever confirmed they had eliminated certain toxic chemicals from their products. However, the group said then companies may have differed in whether they were reformulating globally to meet European standards or were taking a market-by-market approach. Saunders is hoping consumers will start reading ingredients lists carefully or simply go back to a "Cleopatra Age". "Essentially humans have not changed physiologically for thousands of years, and realistically caring for our skin is a very basic enjoyable ritual that, as we have proven, can be very simple," she says. "Generations of women have used simple, wholesome skin care in every culture worldwide for centuries." **Toxic Beauty is on sale at Tasmanian bookshops from March 25**



Beauty just as nature intended

REDNESS, dryness and blotchy patches on her face were all part of life for Sarah, 38, of Kingston.

Working behind department store cosmetic counters for several years did not help her allergic reactions to perfumes and chemicals in skin-care and make-up products.

She said she was constantly trying and searching for quality products but couldn't find any — until she dropped all chemical-based products and went natural two years ago.

She now uses Tasmanian company Beauty & The Bees products and her skin has never looked better.

"When you get into your

thirties I think allergies get worse and your skin gets even more sensitive," she says.

"This product is so natural you don't get any redness or itching — there aren't any perfumes or



ALERGY—FREE: Sarah of Kingston Beach with natural products by Beauty & The Bees. Picture: NIKKI DAVIS-JONES

chemical preservatives."

Sarah recently tried a skin patch test from a big-brand hair dye product and came out in welts.

"I've been using this product and never did a skin test but suddenly there seemed to be warnings all over the packaging," she says. "There were three warnings on the outside of the packet and one inside — I just thought I'd better test it directly on my skin."

She said she came out in a large welt on her skin with red patches.

"We don't pay too much attention to all the chemicals until we can really see what they are doing to us," she said.

These days she uses natural, chemical-free moisturisers, lip balm, eye make-up remover and even natural beer shampoo bars by Beauty & The Bees.

— GENEVIEVE MORTON

TOXIC NASTIES

- **Benzoic acid:** A carboxylic acid that can cause skin irritation and aggravate asthma symptoms.
- **Benzyl alcohol:** A volatile flammable liquid can cause tumors of the adrenal gland.
- **Parabens:** These chemical compounds of parahydroxybenzoic acid have been shown to be oestrogenic and cause allergies.
- **Sodium benzoate:** Causes endocrine disruption along with reproductive effects such as fetotoxicity, skin irritation and brain and nervous system effects.
- **Sodium hydroxymethyl-glycinate:** A synthetic substance, currently lacking safety data on health risks.

Source: Toxic Beauty