

## [ Buying Fragrance Free Products ]

For someone new to the realities of our chemical culture, negotiating the labyrinthine aisles of misleading labels can be a nightmare. Although "Fragrance Free," "Unscented," "Natural," and "Perfume and Dye Free" seem to denote products devoid of toxic scents and chemicals, these labels are deceptive. This creates confusion for well-meaning people who are trying to eliminate chemicals for their own protection or to keep from making chemically sensitive friends sick. Throw out the notion that labels -- or even where you buy your products -- will guide you toward healthy decisions. The Environmental Working Group has methodically studied the clinical data of body care product ingredients, and compiled "best and worst" lists for each type of product. The **most** toxic product list contains healthy-sounding items such as Oilatum Unscented Cleansing Bar, Kiss My Face Shower Gel & Foaming Bath for Cold & Flu, Herbal Clear 24 Hour Natural Sport Deodorant, Jason Natural Cosmetics Tea Tree Deodorant Stick, Dove Face Care Essential Nutrients Cream Cleanser, and Vaseline Intensive Care Lotion: Aloe & Naturals. Some of these products are routinely sold in health food stores.

**"Unscented"** is a misnomer -- it does not mean "without chemical fragrances." If an item is labeled "Unscented," it may contain a masking fragrance (which is a chemical fragrance designed to "block" the smells of other chemicals in the product) and other chemicals. If you search for the products containing "fragrance" in the Environmental Working Group's MSDS listings, you will find conventional "unscented" products (as well as "hypoallergenic" products) listed amongst the obviously scented ones. Manufacturers are not required to list the individual chemical components of fragrance. A 1991 study by the EPA of 31 fragrance products found toxic chemicals such as acetone, benzaldehyde, benzyl acetate, ethanol ethyl acetate, linalool, methylene chloride, and a-terpineol in the fragrances tested. Every single sample also contained toluene, which is neurotoxic, carcinogenic, and considered a hazardous waste.

**"Natural"** is a hit-or-miss term when it comes to body care products. Plenty of so-called natural items sold at health food stores contain synthetic fragrance. Some products may say they have a "natural fragrance," which often means they are scented with essential oils, but might also mean they contain a mixture of essential oils and synthetic fragrance. Essential oils are theoretically nontoxic, as they are derived from plants, but they can contain solvent and pesticide residue, and they are generally unsafe to use around chemically sensitive people, who may react to both the strong smells and the extraction solvents. Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS) is theorized to produce a hyperexcitability of brain structures that creates a heightened susceptibility to seizure activity in the brain, and essential oils -- like chemical neurotoxicants -- can provoke a seizure response. Epilepsy.com reports that common oils of eucalyptus, fennel, hyssop, pennyroyal, rosemary, sage, and wormwood contain strong doses of seizure-inducing compounds. Some people have experienced their first tonic-clonic seizures after using such oils.

**"Fragrance Free"** typically denotes products that are safe for the chemically sensitive, but there are large exceptions, particularly amongst conventional brands.

The second ingredient in Vaseline Intensive Care Advanced Healing Fragrance-Free Lotion, for example, is White Petrolatum, a petroleum by-product, and this lotion scores a 9.2 out of 10 on the toxicity scale of the Environmental Working Group. In general, products labeled "Fragrance Free" are the safest you can buy, but the best bet is to buy these products from a natural food store or a catalogue that caters to the chemically sensitive.

**"Perfume and Dye Free"** is a term primarily used for laundry detergents that are marketed to those with sensitive skin, such as infants. Most of these detergents have "Free" in the label (such as *Tide Free*), and claim to be "free of perfumes and dyes." Actually, they probably contain masking fragrances, so they are not "free" of perfume at all. They also may contain Florescent Whitening Agents ("FWAs") and Ultraviolet Brightener Dyes, which are essentially *dyes*. So "free of perfume and dyes" means "containing masking perfumes and deceptively named dyes." Welcome to the topsy-turvy world of product labeling.

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Fragrance-free products are often hard to find in conventional stores. It is easiest to find fragrance-free, all natural products at a natural foods store. Some acceptable brands are listed below. Fragrance free products can also be ordered from: Needs (800-643-1380), Allen's Naturally (800-352-8971), The Living Source (800-662-8787).

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### **SOAPS**

Dr. Bronner's Unscented Soap, Kiss My Face ORIGINAL Olive Oil Soap, Green Mountain Soap

### **SHAMPOOS**

Dr Bronner's Liquid Unscented Soap, Lagona Free, Pure Essentials Fragrance Free Shampoo, Magick Botanicals Fragrance Free Shampoo, Nature's Gate Soy Fragrance Free, California Baby Sensitive Shampoo

### **LOTIONS/MOISTURIZERS**

Nature's Gate Fragrance-Free Moisturizing Lotion, Alba Botanicals Fragrance Free Lotion, olive oil, almond oil

### **DEODORANTS**

Pure & Basic Green Tea Unscented Deodorant Stick, baking soda, Unscented Deodorant Crystals

### **LAUNDRY DETERGENTS**

Borax, White vinegar & baking soda (an excellent deodorizer as well), Arm & Hammer Super Washing Soda, Seventh Generation Free & Clear

### **HAIR PRODUCTS**

Dissolve one teaspoon of gelatin in a cup of warm water and keep refrigerated for homemade hair gel. Or, melt together beeswax and almond oil to create a thicker, wax-like pomade. Autumn Harp's Un-Petroleum Jelly, Magick Botanicals hair gel, Naturade AloeVera 80 Fragrance Free Styling Spray

### **SUNSCREEN AND INSECT REPELLENTS**

California Baby Sunblock or Sunscreen No Fragrance, Bite Away Insect Repellent, Solar Mosquito Guard

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**For data sheets** on the products you are using, please consult the Environmental Working Group's "Searchable Product Guide" at <http://www.ewg.org>

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