

NDP MLA Gregor Robertson recently made headline news about a future bill that mandates the disclosure and sets limits for toxic substances in food and personal care products. Robertson listed a variety of different compounds including PCBs, formaldehyde and phthalates. Of great concern however, is the omission of parabens.

The catalyst for Robertson's interest in this issue was his children's participation in a study conducted by Environment Defence of Toronto: Polluted Children/Toxic Nation (June 2006). This study found that his children were contaminated with the known carcinogen PCB. The dangers of PCBs and formaldehyde are well known and clearly, the government will not allow formaldehyde in our food chain or personal care products.

Phthalates are compounds used to make plastic materials more flexible and allow them to be moulded. Phthalates are emitted from these plastics in the form of vapours. There is little that can be done to prevent the emission of these vapours unless all plastics are removed and one uses only glass containers.

Parabens however, are an entirely different matter. Parabens are preservatives that are used in most shampoos, toothpastes, creams, sunscreens, lotions and baby wipes, to name a few.

Phthalates and parabens, due to their common chemical structure, mimic estrogen and are therefore xeno-estrogens. These foreign estrogens are also found in the birth control pill, herbicides, pesticides and PCBs. Once they latch onto the body's own estrogen receptors, the level of estrogen in the body rises. High levels of estrogen are linked to an increase in breast cancer, lowering of sperm counts, premature maturation of teenage girls, development of breasts in middle aged men, increase in the prevalence of pre-menstrual syndromes, early onset of menopause, greater incidence of prostate cancer and a rise in endocrine or hormone disorders. Could all of these be a result of the increasing paraben uptake by our body as well as all the other possible xeno-estrogens in our environment?

Interestingly enough, parabens have been found in breast tumour tissues and have been shown to have estrogenic effects on breast cancer cell lines (Journal of Applied Toxicology 2004, Critically Reviewed Toxicology 2005). As parabens are a preservative, the percentage required in a cream or lotion is about 0.2 to 0.3%. If one was to imagine a person having gone through life putting an average of 32 fluid ounces of personal care products on their body each month, one may predict a lifetime exposure of more than 1000 times the amount of parabens found in breast cancer tissues.

In other countries, natural preservatives such as Natamycin and Nicin are used rather than parabens. Under the jurisdiction of Health Canada, the Cosmetic

Regulations of the Food & Drugs Act lists a variety of allowable non-medicinal ingredients. Curiously, this list allows parabens but omits all natural preservatives.

If the Canadian government mandates the use of parabens in our personal care products, our only choice is to avoid using such products, a very painstaking and difficult task. Since their avoidance is so difficult, attention can be paid to their elimination from the body. Infra-red saunas have been shown to break down parabens which then allows them to be eliminated.

An effective detoxification program should include regular far infra-red saunas (weekly or even daily); improving liver detoxification capacity and elimination; daily intake of 6 to 8 glasses of water; colon hydrotherapy and massage therapy to help with lymphatic drainage and elimination.

Continuing to lobby and educate the Canadian government about these toxic substances may result in their removal from our products altogether. Until that time, avoiding and eliminating parabens remains a safe and health choice.

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