Customers itching for personal care alternatives

Get the word out about common allergens to garner new sales

Pamela Emanoil

A esthetician Pamela Drake saw the telltale signs: a red, itchy rash on her client's swollen hands. The cause? Most likely an allergic reaction to a lotion, soap or other topical application. In 2003, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration received approximately 144 reports of adverse reactions to cosmetics. And the FDA admits that there could be a whole lot more, because many people don't go to the government when their skin gets a little inflamed after slathering on a moisturizer or when they get choked up after rubbing on antiperspirant. Instead, they visit someone like Drake, an aesthetician at Pharmaca Integrative Pharmacy in Sonoma, Calif., or an employee at another natural products store for help and natural alternatives.

To find an allergy-free option, the first step is pinpointing the problem ingredient—not always an easy task. After all, the American Academy of Dermatology reports that the average adult uses at least seven different cosmetic products each day. "People can be sensitive to anything," says Kelly Uusitalo, buyer of health and beauty aid products for Bastyr University's Center for Natural Health in Seattle. "Something that affects one person may not affect another." Still, says Drake, "the most common allergens are fragrances and preservatives." Here are several common ingredients that can cause allergic reactions and the pure and safe alternatives to which your customers can turn.

Allergen No. 1: Parabens. Cosmetic manufacturers use this ingredient as a preservative in lotions, creams, facial cleansers, hand soaps, hair conditioners, toothpastes and men's shaving creams, according to the Washington, D.C.-based environmental watchdog Environmental Working Group. Parabens can cause red marks and a raised rash on skin, says Jennifer Barckley, spokeswoman for Weleda, a Palisades, N.Y.-based company that makes natural personal care products. Even worse, parabens can cause what Barckley calls an "internal allergy." The theory goes that because parabens mimic estrogen, they affect hormone function and could ultimately cause cancer. In a 2004 study in the *Journal of Applied Toxicology*, researchers did find parabens in human breast tumor samples.

Alternative: essential oils. Tell customers to look for products containing essential oils, which inhibit bacteria and fungus growth. "In nature, essential oils help preserve the plant," says Barckley. "The purpose they serve in nature is the same as what they do in the beauty product." In addition to their preservative properties, essential oils can offer health benefits. "Rose oil is harmonizing and restorative," Barckley says. "Lavender is calming and soothing." Other alternatives to parabens, Uusitalo says, are sugar (glucose oxidase) and milk (lactoperoxidase), which work as natural enzyme preservatives in creams and lotions.

Allergen No. 2: Fragrances. The most common allergens Drake sees in her practice are synthetic fragrances, which can cause swelling, itching and blisters. Unlike natural ingredients, which the body has been exposed to for many years and therefore knows how to process, synthetic ingredients can surprise us. "The body doesn't recognize them," Uusitalo says. "Some people have chemical sensitivities to them."

Alternative: fragrance-free products. Although people can opt for products with naturally aromatic essential oils, some people with sensitivities to synthetic fragrances are allergic to essential oils, too, according to Drake. To help customers make sound decisions, Weleda not only lists the Latin scientific name for essential oil ingredients, but all the essential oil components. "We do this because of allergy concerns," Barckley says. "Only 1 [percent] to 3 percent of the population has an allergy to essential oils, but we want to ensure that people are informed." To be completely safe, Drake recommends that allergy-prone clients stay away from any fragrances—whether natural or synthetic—in shampoos, conditioners, soaps and detergents.

Allergen No. 3: Aluminum salts. Another "internal allergen" according to Barckley, aluminum pretty much defines antiperspirants. "It blocks the skin's breathing and sweat, so it can cause some external irritation," says Barckley. "But the internal allergy is more serious." Although a 2005 study in the *Journal of Inorganic Biochemistry* found that aluminum could interfere with hormone action, it is unclear whether aluminum actually plays a role in breast cancer incidence. Also, some studies have linked the use of aluminum-based antiperspirants to an increased risk for Alzheimer's disease, but researchers have yet to give the final word on this issue. According to EWG, aluminum is a respiratory toxicant and can trigger asthma.

Alternative: deodorant. These products aren't antiperspirants, so customers can expect to sweat. "You might have to reapply deodorants during the day, but antiperspirants aren't natural; sweating is," says Barckley, who recommends a sage-infused deodorant or one with licorice root extract. Sage and licorice root extract both neutralize bacteria, which causes the unwanted odor, and help relieve inflammation.

Allergen No. 4: Propylene glycol. Like parabens, this ingredient with humectant properties serves as a preservative in just about every type of personal care product, including creams, hair gels and fragrances. Propylene glycol can cause shortness of breath, bumpy rashes and inflammation,

See **PC ALLERGENS** *on page 42*

Circle Reply #136

Circle Reply #137

Petitioner Dr. Squatch
Ex. 1023

Allergy-free options abound—and work

PC ALLERGENS *from page 40*

according to Drake. EWG reports that propylene glycol also enhances penetration, which means it allows other chemicals to penetrate deeper into the skin and thus increases the amounts of chemicals that can reach the bloodstream.

Alternatives: natural oils or antioxidants. For use in creams, Uusitalo recommends that people look for unrefined oils, such as avocado oil, that naturally preserve products and offer many skin-friendly nutrients. "This is whole food for your skin," Uusitalo says. "You want to recognize what's listed on the label and if not, you want to be able to find out without a lot of research." Drake says that natural antioxidants, such as vitamins A, C and E, can also help preserve personal care products without too much allergy risk.

Allergen No. 5: Sodium lauryl sulfate. This ingredient produces the foaming action in shampoos and other products. It also can cause dry, irritated skin, according to Uusitalo. Some experts, such as Drake, aren't so concerned about the ill effects of sodium lauryl sulfate. "I don't get as upset about these in shampoos as I would with some ingredients in lotions, which stay on your skin," Drake says. "You wash off shampoo."

Alternative: aloe. This thick and gooey plant extract can add body to shampoo and lather up. "You get some sudsing," Uusitalo says. "But not to the degree of sodium lauryl sulfate."

Allergen No. 6: Nut oils. Even a hint of nuts in food can be a matter of life or death for some people. Take the example of the Canadian teenager who late last year went into anaphylactic shock and died after kissing her boyfriend, who had eaten a peanut butter sandwich hours earlier. Peanut or tree nut allergies affect about 3 million Americans, about 1.1 percent of the population, according to a 1999 report in the *Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology*. "The question is, can they cause similar allergies if applied topically?" Barckley asks. As a response, in 2005 Weleda removed all nut proteins, which cause the allergic reaction, from its products. "We took out peanut oil protein because of the perceived concern, not because we had any allergy cases," Barckley says.

Natural alternatives: organic sunflower oil or organic sesame seed oil. These are gentle and stable oils, according to Barckley. "They are similar in quality to peanut oil," she says.

Allergen No. 7: Petroleum/mineral oils. These notorious oils in moisturizers are supposed to hydrate the skin, but they "don't let the skin breathe," Uusitalo says. The lack of airflow can lead to a negative reaction, such as a breakout.

Alternative: jojoba oil. A lot of light and natural vegetable oils would work well as a replacement for mineral oils, but jojoba is rich in natural vitamin E and compatible with the skin, Barckley says. "The skin absorbs and utilizes it," she says. "It's not occlusive."

The difference?

In most cases, the natural, allergy-free ingredients will work as well if not better than synthetic ingredients, which tend to be the most common irritants. But keep in mind some of the differences. "We may need to change our concept of what we want from a shampoo, for example," Uusitalo says. "We want it to suds up, remove oils, but then add back in some oils. One natural product may not be able to do it all without chemicals. The chemicals are doing what we're expecting to happen." Also, natural preservatives may not offer a forever-and-a-day shelf life. "If you buy an apple, you know it has a shelf life, and you wouldn't expect otherwise," Uusitalo says. "It's the same with natural products." Most natural products have a two- to three-year maximum shelf life, according to Uusitalo. "Look for expiration dates," she says. "Companies should list them on the package." Still, an informed approach to personal care is worth it, the experts say. "The skin is the largest organ," Uusitalo says. "You're feeding it, so know what you put on it." ■

Pamela Emanoil is a freelance writer in Boulder, Colo.

Ingredients that help heal allergic reactions

Calendula. **A natural cortisonelike ingredient. Encases skin to calm and ease irritations.**

Chamomile. **Soothes and repairs aggravated skin.**

Viola tricolor (wild pansy). **Heals blemishes that can result from allergic reaction.**

FREE WEBSEMINAR • APRIL 18, 2006

How to Create or Enhance Your Private Label Supplement Line

With increasing pressure from food, drug, mass & supernaturals, creating or enhancing your private label supplement line can be an attractive option to increase your store's gross margin, as well as offer an affordable & high-quality option to your customers.

Join us on April 18, 2006 3pm EST
for a live WEB SEMINAR on Private Label Supplement Lines

Topics to be covered:
What is Private Labeling?
Advantages & Disadvantages
The Process: 6 Easy Steps
How to Market your Private Label Brand
How much should it cost?
Avoiding Common Pitfalls
What products should I private label?
Q&A Forum

Learn about:
Bus. Strategies
How much should it all cost?
Logos & Labels
Finding & Comparing Suppliers
Preparing your employees
Marketing & Goals

Come online, watch & listen to a presentation by Paul Licata, President of Licata Enterprises & World Organics and Bill Crawford, New Hope's Director of Retail Publishing Programs.

Register and attend this unique learning event, take advantage of years of experience and make the most out of this high margin opportunity.

Best of all, this seminar is free! Sign yourself up AND alert your friends, managers and co-workers of this free educational opportunity!

Presented by: the natural foods merchandiser deliciousliving

Sponsored by: Licata Enterprises & World Organics

To take advantage of this web seminar visit:
www.naturalfoodsmerchandiser.com/webcast

Circle Reply #139