

[Reprinted from NaturalNews.com]

The Benefits of Using Real, Natural Soap

By Cheryl McCoy

The next time you walk down the soap aisle at your favorite store enjoying the fresh, clean scents and the bright colorful packaging, pay attention. Look at the labels. The vast majority of the products on the shelf don't say 'soap' on their labels. They might be called beauty bars, moisturizing bars, or body bars, but not soap. That's because these bars aren't actually soap and can't legally claim to be; they're detergents. The manufacturers have removed most of the 'good' stuff that occurs in the soap making process, and replaced it with synthetic lathering agents and harsh chemicals. These cheap, plentiful detergent bars are not only bad for your skin, but they're also bad for the planet, too.

What's so bad about it?

Commercial soap manufacturers make it a practice to remove the glycerine that is produced during the saponification (soap-making) process. The glycerine is a highly profitable substance, often sold to other companies who use it to make lotions and moisturizers, which your skin, now dried out from the harsh detergent 'soap,' desperately needs.

Most commercially produced bars contain synthetic lathering agents, artificial colors, and chemicals we can't even pronounce. Antibacterial and antimicrobial soaps often contain triclosan. Triclosan is a toxic chemical that is known to cause cancer. According to the National Coalition Against the Misuse of Pesticides (NCAMP), manufacturers of a number of triclosan-containing products claim that the active ingredient continues to work for as long as 12 hours after use. Consumers are, therefore, exposed to triclosan for much longer than the 20 seconds it takes to wash their hands or face.

Always remember that your skin is porous and absorbent. It absorbs whatever it comes in contact with, much the same as sticking something in your mouth. Chronic use of chemical laden products will cause the body to store the chemicals in the body fat or even in the brain. With enough accumulations of toxins in the body, illness can occur.

These nasty chemicals and toxins are now finding their way into our eco-system. Every time that lather goes down the drain, those pollutants are going with it. A recent report by the UK's Royal Society of Chemistry (RSC) revealed that synthetic chemicals from soap, body washes, shampoos and other healthcare products were sneaking through the filters at water purification plants. The list of offenders included phthalates, which are linked to reproductive disorders in both humans and animals, and parabens, a preservative, which links to cancer.

What's the alternative?

All natural, organic, handmade soap. There are several small businesses selling extremely high quality, all natural, organic soap - yes real soap. Sure, these soap bars generally cost more than the detergent bars you'll find at Wal-Mart. But the difference is these soap bars are actually good for your skin, and are good for the planet.

Choosing the right soap

Just because it's handmade doesn't mean it's good for you, however. You need to understand a few things about the soap making process to know what to look for.

There are basically three ways to make soap. One common way is called "melt and pour" soap. There are even melt and pour kits you can buy to make cute soap shapes with your kids. These are generally glycerine based transparent soaps. They're not as harmful (usually) as the commercial bars, but they're not what we're looking for here.

The other two methods are "hot process" and "cold process." The hot process method utilizes heat after the saponification process has taken place, while the cold process method does not. **The cold process method takes the most time, but is undoubtedly the best method for producing the highest quality soaps.**

Now, we need to discuss the ingredients. Cold process soap bars are made using a combination of oils or fats and lye. Lye sounds a little scary, but all the caustic qualities of the lye are removed during the saponification process. When the lye interacts with the oils or fats, it creates glycerine. The type of oils and fats used make a difference in how hard or soft the soap bar ends up being, and how well it lathers.

With handmade soaps, just like with commercially manufactured bars, you need to read the labels. You want to find soaps that use only pure, organic oils or fats. If plants are used in the bars (many bars incorporate seeds and petals from various plants) they should be certified organic. Avoid any bars that use artificial colors or fragrances. These are synthetic chemicals and you don't want them on your skin or going down your drain. If you want a colored or scented soap bar, look for one that uses organic essential oils and natural, organic colorants.

Another nice ingredient to find in your soaps is Bentonite clay. Bentonite clay is often used to increase lather in soap bars. It has the added benefit of being a natural detoxifier. Bentonite clay binds with and removes toxins from your body, and it's extremely eco-friendly.

To sum it up, the best soap for your skin and our planet is a handmade, organic, all natural cold process soap bar. Once you've tried one of these lathery treasures, you'll never again be satisfied with 'store-bought' bars. So do yourself and your world a big favor and start using REAL soap.

Resources:

Kim Deleary, "Your Skin Absorbs Whatever You Put On It," http://skin-nail-care.suite101.com/article.cfm/absorbing_the_right_in... (accessed April 21, 2009)

"Toxic Chemicals from Shampoo, Soap May Be Seeping into Drinking Water," Medindia.com, <http://www.medindia.net/news/Toxic-Chemicals-from-Shampoo-Soap-may-Be...> (accessed April 21, 2009)

Smart Soapmaking, Anne L. Watson, 2007, Shepard Publications

Mike Adams, NaturalNews.com, "Toxic chemical triclosan commonly found in anti-bacterial soaps, toothpaste products," <http://www.naturalnews.com/022178.html> (accessed April 21, 2009)

About the author

Cheryl McCoy manages the website www.AboutClay.com, an information and educational resource for the various uses of healing clay. She discovered the amazing benefits of Living Clay several years ago, and has been an ardent advocate for this clay ever since. She may be contacted at Info@AboutClay.com.