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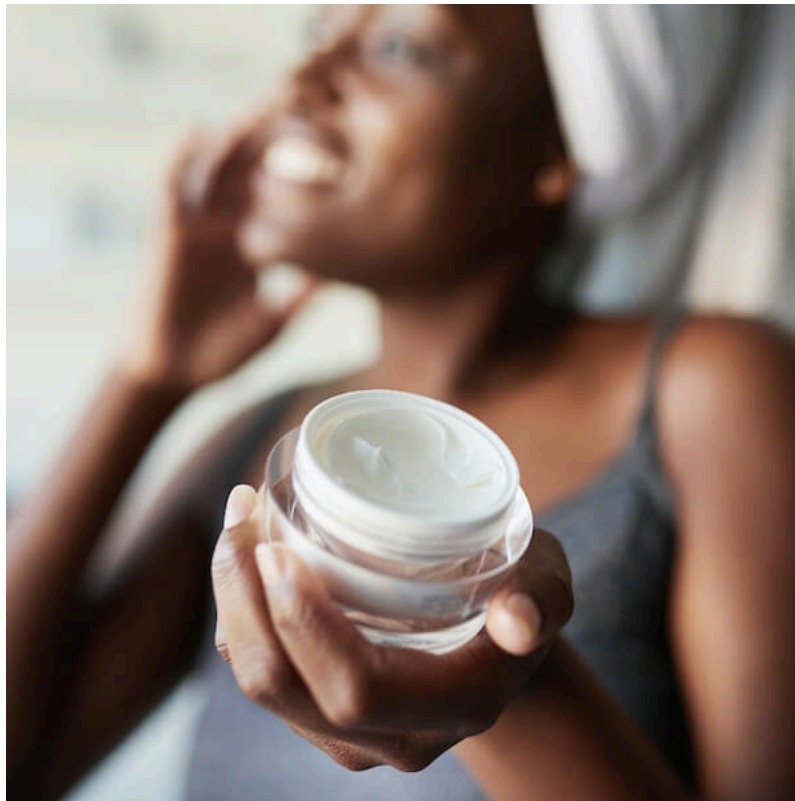
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# Hydroquinone

Hydroquinone is most commonly used in skin lighteners, products heavily marketed towards women of color. It is linked to cancer and organ-system toxicity.



# WHAT IS HYDROQUINONE?

Hydroquinone is marketed most aggressively to women of color for its whitening ability in skin creams. The chemical is allowed in personal care products in the United States in concentrations up to two percent. Although banned in the European Union, a UK news report found that products containing hydroquinone were relatively easy to procure.<sup>[1]</sup>

In addition to its use in skin lighteners, hydroquinone is a possible impurity of tocopheryl acetate<sup>[2]</sup> (synthetic Vitamin E) which is very common in facial and skin cleansers, facial moisturizers and hair conditioners.

## Found In

- Skin lighteners
- Facial and skin cleansers
- Facial moisturizers
- Hair conditioners
- Finger nail coating products.

## What to look for on the label

- Hydroquinone
- Tocopheryl acetate

## Health Concerns

**Cancer:** Hydroquinone works by decreasing the production and increasing the degradation of melanin pigments in the skin. This increases the skin's exposure to UVA and UVB rays, increasing the risk of skin cancer.<sup>[3]</sup>

**Organ-system toxicity:** Hydroquinone is linked to a skin condition called ochronosis in which the skin (our largest organ) thickens and turns bluish-grey.<sup>[4]</sup> Exposure of the eye can cause pigmentation and permanent corneal damage.<sup>[5]</sup>

**Respiratory Tract Irritation:** Hydroquinone may be harmful if inhaled, causing irritation of the nose, throat and upper respiratory tract. A study on occupational exposure of hydroquinone showed that subjects exposed to hydroquinone had a higher

prevalence of a cough and decreased lung capacity compared to their unexposed counterparts.<sup>[6]</sup>

## Vulnerable Populations

Women of Color (<https://www.safecosmetics.org/population/women-of-color/>).

## Regulations

Banned from cosmetics in the European Union; restricted use in Canadian cosmetics. The U.S. Cosmetics Ingredients Review Panel indicates that hydroquinone is unsafe for use in products that are left on the skin, but because of lax enforcement, directions for skin-lightening products containing hydroquinone encourage frequent and consistent use on the skin.<sup>[7][8][9]</sup> It has been recommended to the National Toxicology Program (NTP) for further studies. The FDA continues to allow the availability of products containing hydroquinone in OTC drugs.

## How to Avoid?

Consumers should avoid products that list hydroquinone. Consumers should check with companies to confirm the purity of tocopheryl acetate, due to concerns about hydroquinone contamination.

## FAQs

What is hydroquinone?



How does it work?



Is hydroquinone a steroid?



Is hydroquinone banned in the United States?



Is hydroquinone good for your skin?



Does hydroquinone cause cancer?



How could hydroquinone cause cancer?



What other symptoms of toxicity may hydroquinone cause?



Do I really have to use topical medications for my skin care?



## Explore other Chemicals

**Resorcinol** (<https://www.safecosmetics.org/chemicals/resorcinol/>).

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**Triclosan** (<https://www.safecosmetics.org/chemicals/triclosan/>).

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## Looking for a Safer Alternative?

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## Your Action Helps

Together, we can make beauty safer for all.

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### FILTER BY:

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