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Talc

Some talc may contain the known carcinogen asbestos, therefore it should be avoided in powders and other personal care products, unless it is known to be asbestos-free. Even asbestos-free talc should be avoided in the pelvic areas.



WHAT IS TALC?

Talc is a naturally occurring mineral substance used in a variety of cosmetic and personal care products from baby powders to eye shadows. It is added to absorb moisture, smooth or soften products, prevent caking, and make makeup opaque.^[1]

Talc is also used as an anti-sticking substance and anticaking agent in food products and dispersing agent in animal feed and fertilizers.^[2] Talc-containing feminine hygiene products are widely distributed and commonly used in the United States.^[3]

Talc can be mined from the earth or produced industrially.^[4] Some talc is contaminated with asbestos and asbestos fibers, a mineral substance linked to cancer,^{[5],[6]} as a result of its close proximity to talc deposits and mining sites. Testing talc samples for asbestos is the only way to identify contamination.^[7] Two-thirds of baby powders tested in Korea contained asbestos.^[8]

Generally, the only way for consumers to know if products are free of asbestos is if manufacturers use talc that is tested and certified as asbestos-free. However, one type of asbestos known as tremolite was found in cosmetic talcum powders labeled "tremolite-free," suggesting that this approach is not foolproof.^{[9],[10]}

It is important to note that talc containing asbestos differs from asbestiform talc, as the term "asbestiform" describes patterns of mineral growth and not the presence of asbestos or other minerals.^[11] However, there are some concerns about occupational exposure to asbestiform talc, specifically lung disease among miners and industrial workers.^[12]

Found In

- Baby powder
- Body and shower products
- Lotions
- Feminine hygiene products
- Eyeshadow
- Foundation
- Lipstick
- Deodorants
- Face masks

What to look for on the label

- Talcum powder
- Cosmetic talc

Health Concerns

Irritation: Case studies of infants inhaling talc-containing baby powder showed severe respiratory distress.^{[13],[14]}

Cancer: The International Agency for Research on Cancer lists talc containing asbestos as a human carcinogen while perineal use of talc is classified as possibly carcinogenic.^{[15],[16]} Talc use is linked to endometrial and ovarian cancer.^{[17],[18]} Cosmetic talc applied to the pelvic area, from feminine hygiene products or diaper changes, enters the body and can reach distant organs. This may explain why talc has been found in women's ovaries and pelvic lymph nodes.^{[19],[20]} Genital talc use increases risk of endometrial cancer among postmenopausal women.^{[21],[22],[23]} For all women, risk may increase with frequency of use, although this remains contended.^{[24],[25],[26]}

Talc exposure is associated with mesothelioma, a tumor of tissue lining organs such as the lungs, stomach, and heart. Previous talcum exposure is involved in the development and pathogenesis of lung cancer. Workers in the New York talc industry were more likely to develop mesothelioma, which was attributed to inhalation of dust.^[27]

Organ system toxicity: Talc elevates lung burden. Talc inhalation can interfere with mechanisms that clean lungs and mitigate inflammation thereby damaging cells and potentially leading to cancer.^[28] In human lung epithelial cells, nanoscale talc particles damaged and killed cells while inducing oxidative stress, which is the buildup of harmful molecular agents in the body.^[29] Asbestos was found in the lung tissue and lymph nodes of women using cosmetic powders containing talc.^[30] Talc exposure, especially via personal care products, can also lead to a diseased respiratory tract as characterized by labored breathing and coughing.^{[31],[32],[33]}

Talc adversely affects the female genital system resulting in infection and inflammation.^[34] Talcum powder is toxic to ovarian tissue in rats.^[35]

Vulnerable Populations

Babies & Children (<https://www.safecosmetics.org/population/babies-children/>),
Workers (<https://www.safecosmetics.org/population/workers/>).

Regulations

Talc is restricted in cosmetic products in the European Union.^[36]

How to Avoid?

Avoid personal care and cosmetic products that contain talc if used in the pelvic or genital area. Choose companies that certify their talc is free of asbestos.

Explore other Chemicals

Mica (<https://www.safecosmetics.org/chemicals/mica/>)

Hydroquinone (<https://www.safecosmetics.org/chemicals/hydroquinone/>)

Benzophenone & Related Compounds
(<https://www.safecosmetics.org/chemicals/benzophenone/>)

Petrolatum, Petroleum Jelly (<https://www.safecosmetics.org/chemicals/petrolatum/>)

Butylated Compounds (<https://www.safecosmetics.org/chemicals/butylated-compounds/>)

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