



it just ain't "natural"!

We know that natural is good for us...don't we? When I see "natural" on a label I'd expect the contents of that product to be good for my kids, my family and for the earth.

Did you know "Natural Flavours" in food are fundamentally no different to artificial ones? The only difference between "natural" food colours and "artificial" ones is that the natural ones began with a real food stuff. In his book "Fast Food Nation" Eric Schlosser devotes a chapter to the Natural Flavour (and aroma) industry, with a fascinating, but somewhat depressing description of his visit to International Flavours & Fragrances (IFF), the worlds largest flavour company.

"Natural flavours and artificial flavours sometimes contain exactly the same chemicals, produced through different methods. Amyl acetate, for example, provides the dominant note of banana flavour. When it is distilled from bananas with a solvent, amyl acetate is a natural flavour. When it is produced by mixing vinegar with amyl alcohol and adding sulphuric acid as a catalyst, amyl acetate is an artificial flavour. Either way it smells and tastes the same... Natural and artificial flavours are now manufactured at the same chemical plants, places that few people would associate with Mother Nature."

Would you be surprised to learn that 'natural' products can contain ingredients which are carcinogenic? (yes...that right...they cause cancer).

A Finnish study showed traces of methyl paraben (the most commonly used ingredient in cosmetics after water) in 18 out of 20 breast cancer tumours. Now personally I'm not going to wait til it's proven (or disproven) that methyl paraben causes cancer... let's err on the side of caution.

Of course, every marketer on earth knows consumers, especially parents, want "natural". If there's a bottle on a shelf marked 100% artificial and one marked 100% natural it's pretty predictable which one we'll choose for our family.

But if these products are on the shelf they must be safe, right? "Someone" (the government?) must be monitoring them. Well, you'd think so. An interesting quote from the Director of the FDA's Office of Cosmetics and Colours (Food & Drug Authority - USA)

"Consumers believe if it's on the market it must be safe. And this belief is sometimes wrong"

Currently the beauty industry is self-regulated and the ingredients are only banned if they are proved to be unsafe. There is no obligation for manufacturers to prove they are safe before they even put them in the products. There's nothing like hindsight to show how mistaken this approach is (remember formaldehyde)

Now, whether you actually use beauty products or make up (and with 3 kids under 7, and a dwindling social life...let's say it's not the norm). But I certainly DO wash... and so do my kids. Think about it... shampoo, deodorant, moisturiser, sunscreen, bubble bath etc etc. With all those toxic nasties in them, even small amounts of exposure to these products adds up.

I looked at the ingredients on the product from a shop that is marketed as pro-environment and "natural" and found of the 22 ingredients (other than water) only 3 were plant extract (i.e. 'natural') and they were way down the listing (ingredients are listed by volume). The top ingredients were:-

- Sodium Laureth Sulfate
- Cocamidopropyl Betaine
- Cocamide Diethanolamine
- Phenoxyethanol

And lower down on the ingredients list was 4 parabens (methyl paraben, butyl paraben, ethyl paraben and propyl paraben!)

Nobody likes being manipulated by advertising and marketing. We'd probably like to think we're savvy

enough to be one step ahead of the marketers. But when you see phrases such as "from coconut oil" or "natural food colours" on a label, what do you think? If you think they're safe...think again.

If you'd like to know what's in the bottles on your bathroom shelf, look up the Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS) from the manufacturers of the ingredients. <http://hazard.com/msds/>

Read the ingredients listing before you buy! Run some of your favourite brands ingredients through the database at www.cosmeticsdatabase.com

Fast Food Nation by Eric Schlosser is great reading on more than just the "natural" food flavours industry. Grab a copy from your local library or get the dramatised version on DVD.

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"A little knowledge that acts is worth infinitely more than much knowledge that is idle."

Kahlil Gibran

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