



Healing Beauty

These soothing remedies can help you look and feel your best.

BY LINDSEY GALLOWAY AND ELIZABETH MARGLIN

When former model Blaire Kessler began treatment for breast cancer at age 31, her hair looked like a Brillo pad, her skin scarred badly, and her body became an early-menopausal mess. Well-meaning friends brought her skin creams that to her looked, smelled, and felt medicinal. Even the packaging depressed her—it seemed so drab and sterile. What's more, Kessler had grown deeply skeptical about cosmetic ingredients. Lying in bed, trying to figure out why she had gotten cancer, as patients are wont to do, Kessler turned a lens on everything she put on or in her body, from diet to makeup. What she found out disturbed her: Many of her beauty standbys, as well as the gifts her friends had brought, came loaded with a hefty cocktail of carcinogens and skin irritants. Frustrated that she couldn't find the type of skincare she wanted, Kessler started Pristine Recovery, a paraben- and phthalate-free line geared expressly for women undergoing radiation and chemotherapy.

Part of a growing trend of toxin-free, condition-targeted skincare lines, Pristine Recovery highlights the therapeutic potential of herbs, plants, and oils. While chemotherapy

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Soothing Balms

Check out these natural products that can help you recover from skin trauma of the most bothersome kind.

FOR SKIN-RELATED SIDE EFFECTS CAUSED BY CANCER TREATMENTS:



Pristine Recovery Take a Whiff Deodorant

White sage, long used by the Dakota Indians as a natural antiperspirant, gives this deodorant staying power, while tangerine oil promotes circulation. **(\$20, 3.25 oz; pristinerecovery.com)**



Pristine Recovery No More Scary Hairy Serum

Loaded with nutrient-rich oils, avocado butter, and moisturizing squalene, this hair revival serum puts the kibosh on radiation-induced frizz. **(\$42, 1.5 oz; pristinerecovery.com)**



Simply Divine Botanicals Keeping Ahead of It Massage Cream

Chaparral and pokeroor, two powerful desert herbs known for their ability to remove toxins from the body, play a starring role in this rich balm designed to encourage lymphatic drainage. **(\$30, 4 oz; simplydivinebotanicals.com)**

represents the far end of the skin trauma spectrum, other common skin conditions also warrant special consideration. Eczema, psoriasis, rosacea, and extremely sensitive skin may worsen or improve in response to particular ingredients. People who suffer from multiple-chemical sensitivity, for example, might look to a fragrance-free line, while people with eczema do best with plants that have anti-inflammatory properties.

No matter your circumstances—whether you are undergoing chemo, waging war on psoriasis, or (lucky you) sporting a peaches-and-cream complexion—the last thing you want on your skin are hormone disruptors, talc, petroleum by-products, and carcinogens. At the very least, they exacerbate skin problems rather than cure them. Yet despite our growing awareness of the dangers of parabens, phthalates, and their ilk, many skincare companies blithely continue to fold them into their products. As Samuel

Epstein, MD, the chairman of the Cancer Prevention Coalition, puts it, “Because skin so readily absorbs cosmetic ingredients, it is prudent to avoid those chemicals that may cause adverse reactions, such as allergies, irritation, and cancer.”

But it's not all doom and gloom. Several companies have recently introduced products that ban the nasties in favor of an arsenal of holistic extracts designed to soothe and heal. Here's our situation-specific lowdown on what to avoid and what to seek out.

Cancer

Cancer patients have more skin and hair issues to deal with than the average woman: red, peeling rashes; scarring; sensitivity to fragrance; hand-foot syndrome (a side effect of some cancer treatments that results in tender red skin of the palms and soles); risk of systemic infections from broken skin surfaces; and frizzy or thinning hair.

FOR ECZEMA OR PSORIASIS:

Bioderbe Organic Skincare Emulsion 1 Day Treatment

A quick-absorbing cream that protects skin from stress and pollution with help from echinacea and antioxidants. The emulsion is also certified organic and tested to be nickel-free. (\$65, 1.7 oz; gaiatree.com)



derma e Psorzema Crème

Infused with neem, burdock, and vitamins A and E, this anti-inflammatory cream softens dry skin and reduces redness. (\$19.95, 4 oz; dermae.net)

FOR SENSITIVE SKIN OR MULTIPLE CHEMICAL SENSITIVITY:



Lotus Moon Cherry Blossom Healing Soothe

Skip the hydrocortisone cream for the willowherb extract in this crème—studies show willowherb works more effectively at reducing redness and inflammation. Plus, horse chestnut and butcher's broom extracts strengthen capillary walls to support the skin long-term. (\$38, 1.3 oz; lotusmoon.biz)

Grateful Body Environmental Impact Facial Cleanser

This gentle cleanser comes free of harsh soaps, foaming agents, and added scents. Seaweed extract, witch hazel, and vitamin A restore skin's natural detoxifying and healing abilities. (\$24.95, 3.5 oz; gratefulbody.com)



With all these very real and quite visible concerns to worry about, another, more intangible issue lurks in the background: the need to feel attractive, radiant, and cared for. The French have a saying for this kind of beauty: *bien dans sa peau*, or to feel comfortable in one's skin. Delicately fragrant luxury ingredients, coupled with beautiful packaging, make a difference—especially for a cancer survivor's fragile psyche. "I chose upbeat, old Hollywood glamour for my packaging because I wanted to communicate a positive message," Kessler says. "We all want products that make us feel pretty."

But the ingredients themselves—more than the packaging—provide these specialized lines their bona fides. Kessler researched Native American remedies and discovered yucca root's effect on skin sores, scarring, and even arthritis. Yucca along with rose hip—

seed oil (another remedy for scars) and jojoba oil (renowned for its moisturizing properties) are the powerhouses of Kessler's Brallywood Butta (she also makes a creamsicle-smelling deodorant and a hair serum). Formulated with the breast and underarm area in mind, Kessler's butter also contains tangerine oil, which works as an anti-inflammatory, promotes circulation, and stimulates the lymphatic system.

Most lines aimed at cancer patients usually include deodorant because the lymph nodes located in the armpit make this area a red-alert zone. The lymphatic system protects the body from infection, so a deodorant filled with harsh chemicals adds an unnecessary burden on the hardworking lymph.

In addition, sweat serves an important purpose: clearing toxins out of the body. Using a deodorant with antiperspirants designed to block sweat, or loaded with other potentially toxic

chemicals, only serves as a dangerous impediment to the body's natural detox mechanism.

Eczema/psoriasis

Itchy, flaky skin can occasionally plague even the most moisturized among us, especially during the winter months. But those with eczema or psoriasis suffer from flaking, irritated skin all year long. Often an allergen triggers inflammation, which interferes with the skin's ability to shed and renew itself. Some of the top allergens include fragrance and the heavy metal nickel, both of which can be found in beauty products ranging from foot cream to eye shadow.

"The term *fragrance* refers to numerous different molecules, many of which are common allergens," says Valori Treloar, MD, an integrative dermatologist based in Newton, Massachusetts. "Unfortunately, just because a molecule comes from a plant source doesn't mean it can't be a contact allergen. In fact, chamomile and calendula, both commonly used on the skin, come from the allergenic daisy family."

As for nickel, you won't find it listed directly on any product label since this by-product is derived from other ingredients, like water, food, or minerals. "Foods naturally high in nickel include chocolate, soybeans, nuts, and oatmeal," says Treloar. "I've seen topical products with all these foods, and the nickel content may be high enough to trigger contact dermatitis." Watch for your skin's reaction when using cosmetics made with iron oxides, which may also contain nickel.

"Those with eczema should also avoid anything that ends in the word *acid*," explains Linda Miles, DOM, LAc, vice president of derma e Natural Bodycare. "Acids, such as glycolic and alpha lipoic, will be too harsh on the skin." Avoid mineral oil as well, as it will clog the skin and interfere with its normal regenerative functions.

Some eczema skincare lines have made it easy to find products that can actually help alleviate the symptoms. The Italian line Bioderbe, for example,

delivers certified organic creams tested to be nickel-free. Derma e's Psorzema line contains neem, used in India for millennia as an anti-inflammatory, and vitamin A, which increases cell turnover.

Sensitive skin/rosacea/ multiple chemical sensitivity

While chemical ingredients take their toll on our bodies over time, some women, like Lisa Tramontana of Chicago, feel the effects of those toxins immediately. After getting deep lesions on her hands, face, and back, Tramontana was diagnosed with multiple chemical sensitivities. Her conventional docs advised her to steer clear of herbal products because of potential allergens, but their suggested clinical lines gave her no relief. Plus, the "gentle" and "hypoallergenic" soaps, lotions, and ointments carried chemicals with unsafe ratings on the Environmental Working Group's Skin Deep database (cosmeticsdatabase.com).

"Finally, my herbalist convinced me plants and herbs were not going to hurt me as much as synthetic chemicals," says Tramontana. She turned to Grateful Body's Environmental Impact line, formulated for extremely sensitive skin. "Within a week, I saw a noticeable difference," says Tramontana. "And in 45 days, my face, although scarred, was very nearly healed."

Rather than the Grateful Body line being "fragrance-free" (which most companies achieve by adding a chemical scent-inhibitor to the product), Mary Cuneo, the co-owner, considers it "scent neutral." It contains no essential oils and few aromatic herbs, so it won't bother those with high sensitivities.

Essential oils might be fine for those with sensitive skin, but many companies extract the oils using chemical solvents. Look for steam-distilled or pressed oils if you're concerned about your skin reacting negatively.

Those with sensitive skin or rosacea may find relief using anti-inflammatory ingredients. "Redness occurs when tiny blood vessels become inflamed," says Miles. "Anti-inflammatories like pycnogenol and horse chestnut extract support the capillary system and work both internally and topically." ■