

Behind the Dazzling Smile

Toxic Ingredients in Your Toothpaste?



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A REPORT BY THE CORNUCOPIA INSTITUTE | JULY 2016



The Cornucopia Institute wishes to thank the foundations that support our research and the thousands of family farmers and organic advocates who fund this work with their generous donations.

The Cornucopia Institute is chartered as a tax-exempt public charity, focusing on research and education. Cornucopia aims to empower organic producers, consumers, and wholesale buyers to make discerning marketplace decisions to protect the credibility of the organic food and farming movement and the value it delivers to society.

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Report design and layout: Draft Horse Studio | drafthorsestudio.com

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Executive Summary

CARCINOGENS, ENDOCRINE DISRUPTERS, ALLERGENS, IRRITANTS, and other toxic chemicals do not belong in cosmetics or personal care products. Yet, they may all be found in toothpastes and other oral health products, even in those marketed as “natural.”

The United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA), does not systematically assess the safety of personal care products. Rather, the \$71 billion cosmetics industry reviews, assesses, and evaluates its own products—self-regulating in the absence of strong or meaningful federal regulatory oversight.

The U.S. lags behind many other countries in cosmetic safety, allowing the use of hazardous chemicals banned in Canada, Japan, and Europe. Just 11 of more than 12,000 ingredients used in cosmetics are restricted for use in the U.S., while more than 1,300 chemicals have been prohibited in cosmetics sold throughout Europe.

Every day the average man uses five to seven personal care products, containing 85 unique ingredients. The average woman uses nine to 12 products daily, containing 168 unique ingredients, while the average teenage girl will use up to 17 products each day, containing more than 200 unique ingredients. But outdated, obsolete, and overall toothless regulations, as well as a glaring lack of public information, imply that millions of Americans are kept in the dark about the safety of personal care products used on our bodies and in our mouths.

The law governing cosmetics was passed in 1938 and, despite the development of a plethora of synthetic compounds commonly used in personal care items, has not been significantly amended since it was enacted. In fact, compared to its authority to oversee pharmaceuticals and food products, the FDA is virtually powerless when it comes to regulating cosmetics.

The FDA has no power to review products before they go on the market. Companies do not have to list all of the ingredients in their products, nor are they required to register their manufacturing facilities with the government or report “adverse events,” making it difficult for regulators to identify potential problems. Essentially, the cosmetics industry regulates itself.



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As a result, it's nearly impossible for the average consumer to evaluate all the chemical ingredients in, and potentially harmful effects of, cosmetics and personal care products.

The Cornucopia Institute's research on toothpaste uncovered some interesting information:

- When potentially toxic chemical ingredients are present in toothpaste and mouthwash, they are likely to pass directly and quickly into the bloodstream, **even if the product is not swallowed.** This is because the membrane lining of the mouth (oral mucosa) has an absorption efficiency of more than 90%, according to the Physician's Desk Reference Handbook.¹
- A label containing the word "natural" does not necessarily mean a toothpaste is free of potentially harmful ingredients.
- Some prominent "natural" brands are manufactured by companies that primarily sell mass-marketed brands. For example, Tom's of Maine is owned by Colgate-Palmolive, the company that also makes Colgate toothpastes.
- Toothpastes sold in Europe have different, safer formulations **than the same products, made by the same companies** and sold in the U.S., to accommodate stricter EU cosmetics laws.
- The American Dental Association is heavily subsidized by the cosmetic industry, creating a conflict of interest. Its seal does not guarantee the safety of toothpastes, or other oral products, or the quality of the ingredients in these products.
- The drive to maximize profit margins focuses investments in advertising and packaging, rather than safe and high quality ingredients.
- Many ingredients in toothpastes are synthetics derived from petroleum or from heavily processed and synthesized natural ingredients. In their final formulation, they may differ greatly from the natural parent compound (e.g., coconut oil) or may even become potentially toxic.
- Toothpaste ingredient labels are often unintelligible, with difficult-to-pronounce ingredients that only a cosmetics chemist could decipher or understand.
- Some toothpastes may contain contaminated ingredients. In addition, toxic compounds may be formed by the interaction of ingredients under certain conditions or may be released slowly over time.
- The average American will use approximately 20 gallons of toothpaste over his or her lifetime.
- Children are at greater risk of exposure, because they tend to ingest more toothpaste than adults; in addition, their exposure will be greater than adults' in terms of amount of toothpaste used per body weight.

THE STORY OF COSMETICS



For a quick overview of the issues related to cosmetic ingredients in the U.S., we recommend a short animated video called *The Story of Cosmetics* with Annie Leonard by the Story of Stuff Project in association with the Campaign for Safe Cosmetics. See <https://youtu.be/pfq000AF1i8>

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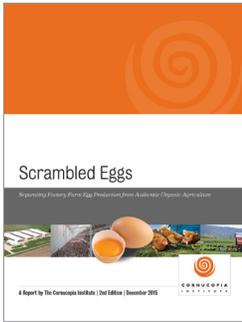
- Toothpastes specifically targeted to children often contain artificial colors (food dyes), which have been linked to hyperactivity and related behavioral problems in children. Some such ingredients also pose a risk of cancer and allergic reactions.²

When it comes to cosmetics, especially the personal care products we put in our mouths, it would be easy to assume that the companies selling them, and the governments regulating them, would ensure their safety. However, the cosmetic industry, aided by a lack of government oversight, has become quite similar to the processed junk food industry—using cheap and potentially toxic ingredients to manufacture questionable products that are marketed under faddish and misleading health claims. However, several third-party certifications do exist that help assure the quality of toothpaste ingredients and the safety of certified products.

The following report explains how the cosmetics industry is regulated and highlights specific toothpaste ingredients to avoid. It discusses organic brands and provides consumers with recipes to make your own safe and effective toothpastes.

In addition, The Cornucopia Institute has created a web-based scorecard, designed to help consumers determine the safest toothpastes with the least objectionable ingredients.

ALSO PUBLISHED BY THE CORNUCOPIA INSTITUTE:



Scrambled Eggs: Separating Factory Farm Egg Production from Authentic Organic Agriculture, 2nd edition.



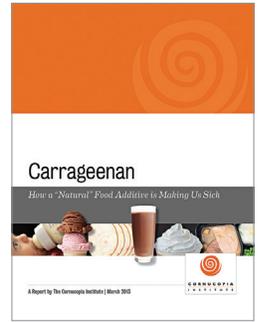
Protecting Children's Health: Choosing Organic Food to Avoid GMOs and Agricultural Chemicals



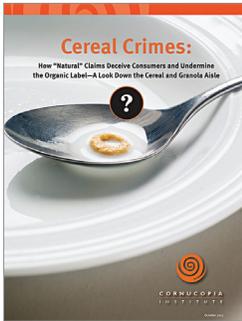
Decoding Pet Food: Adulteration, Toxic Ingredients, and the Best Choices for Your Companion Animals



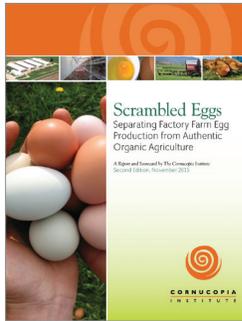
Culture Wars: How the Food Giants Turned Yogurt, a Health Food, into Junk Food



Carrageenan: How a "Natural" Food Additive is Making Us Sick



Cereal Crimes: How "Natural" Claims Deceive Consumers and Undermine the Organic Label—A Look Down the Cereal and Granola Aisle



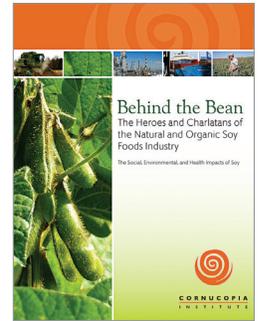
Scrambled Eggs: Separating Factory Farm Egg Production from Authentic Organic Agriculture, 1st edition.



Maintaining the Integrity of Organic Milk: Showcasing ethical family farm producers, exposing the corporate takeover of factory farm production



Replacing Mother—Imitating Human Breast Milk in the Laboratory: Novel oils in infant formula and organic foods: Safe and valuable functional food or risky marketing gimmick?



Behind the Bean. The Heroes and Charlatans of the Natural and Organic Soy Foods Industry



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THE CORNUCOPIA INSTITUTE is engaged in research and educational activities supporting the ecological principles and economic wisdom underlying sustainable and organic agriculture. Through research and investigations on agricultural and food issues, The Cornucopia Institute provides needed information to family farmers, consumers, stakeholders involved in the good food movement, and the media.

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