

Is the label 'hypoallergenic' helpful or just marketing hype?

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Many consumers seek out shampoos, soaps and cosmetics that are labeled "hypoallergenic" or "dermatologist tested," words that imply the products are safe to use. But recent research gives shoppers reason to question what those labels really mean. Now some scientists and consumer advocates are calling for change, according to an article in *Chemical & Engineering News (C&EN)*, the weekly newsmagazine of the American Chemical Society.

Britt E. Erickson, a senior editor at *C&EN*, notes that the definitions of the terms "hypoallergenic" and "[dermatologist](#) tested/recommended" is currently left to the manufacturers that put them on their products. The Food and Drug Administration has not set any standards for using these descriptions. The last time the agency attempted to do so was in the 1970s, but cosmetic industry giants Almay and Clinique challenged the regulation and ultimately won in an appeals court.

A recent study on 187 personal care products formulated for children has shown that most contain at least one known skin allergen even if they're marketed as hypoallergenic. Some companies are self-regulating and moving away from using certain compounds, such as those that release formaldehyde. But that doesn't necessarily guarantee a safer product. And one preservative that some manufacturers have turned to in place of parabens, which are endocrine disruptors, can cause allergic reactions. Some researchers are calling for the FDA to step in. But for now, it is up to consumers to shop by trial and error.

Provided by American Chemical Society

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