

Men's use of personal care products, and chemicals they contain, has doubled in 20 years

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Men's use of personal care products has almost doubled since 2004, exposing them to some potentially harmful chemicals, a new study commissioned by the Environmental Working Group (EWG) finds.

Overall, the average American adult uses 12 [personal care products](#) a day that contain as many as 112 [chemical ingredients](#). That's a change from the previous average of nine products with 126 unique chemical ingredients, according to EWG's study from 2004.

And the gap between men's and women's use of products is shrinking. On average, women use around 13 care products a day, up from 12, the study says. Men, on the other hand, went from six in 2004 to 11 products daily: six products for body care, one for skin care, one cosmetic, two for hair care and one for baby care.

Heavy users abound, too. Ten percent of U.S. adults use more than 25 products every day, including cosmetics, shampoos, moisturizers, deodorants, soaps and more, the [report](#) reveals.

This isn't necessarily cause for alarm, however.

"While the number of products exposed or used daily has increased, the number of unique ingredients has decreased," said [Homer Swei](#), EWG senior vice president of healthy living science. "I do think it seems that the combination of clean beauty, stewardship retailer programs, U.S. state laws and [consumer information](#) has fundamentally changed the marketplace across the board. I can also see this trend toward healthy in the ingredients."

Most of the ingredients, said Swei, scored green, the best rating in EWG's ["Skin Deep" database](#), which rates nearly 100,000 personal care products for their safety. However, some of the ingredients still raised concerns for the researchers.

They found that, based on the 2,200 people surveyed for the study, U.S. consumers are exposed daily to an average of two ingredients linked to cancer and two that are linked to chemicals that can harm the reproductive and development systems.

These exposures mainly come from body care, skin care and cosmetics. They include chemicals like parabens, talc, cyclopentasiloxane, methylchloroisothiazolinone, methylisothiazolinone and triethanolamine. They also found that the average adult is exposed to 15 fragrance chemicals a day, with seven being chemicals that can cause allergic reactions.

"The term fragrance is what we consider to be an umbrella term, which means it can hide up to 4,000 different chemicals. And that can also mean there are phthalates that might be considered to be a fragrance ingredient. And those are hormone-disrupting ingredients," said [Sydney Swanson](#), healthy living science analyst at EWG. "Since the term fragrance isn't necessarily needed to be disclosed, consumers can be exposed to any sort of ingredient that might fall into the term fragrance."

Consumers are better educated today, the survey noted, and a large majority of adults—85%—are concerned about the safety of product ingredients.

Some professionals like [Dr. Raman Madan](#), a dermatologist at Northwell Health in Huntington, N.Y., said EWG's report might cause unnecessary anxiety among consumers.

"A lot of what these kinds of chemicals are and what they do to the body, I think sometimes get a little overblown because at the end of the day, a lot of these things don't get absorbed by the body, or if they do, they get absorbed in such minimal, minimal, minimal ways that they really won't have much of a difference on the body. The other thing is

you get exposed to so many different things throughout the day," he said.

"I think people get caught up a lot in trying to make sure they use [chemical](#)-free products. But in the end, a lot of these organic products and things like that, they still have chemicals in them," added Madan, who wasn't involved in the study.

Currently, only a handful of ingredients are banned by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration from use in personal care products. But consumers are beginning to fight back.

In June of this year, Johnson & Johnson reached an \$8.9 billion settlement for thousands of lawsuits alleging that its talc products cause cancer. In 2020, California also passed the Toxic-Free Cosmetics Act, which will ban 24 ingredients from cosmetic products beginning in 2025. Other states like Minnesota, New York, Oregon and Washington have also passed or are considering new safety laws for personal care products.

In the meantime, Swei said that companies themselves are becoming more open about what's in their products.

"We are seeing increased trends towards transparency. So I can see many more ingredients, especially with fragrances, allergens being added to the labels," he said. "Still, some disappointments about the ingredients that I think should not be there are still there, but they're slowly dropping."

More information: For more on what's currently restricted in cosmetics, visit the [FDA's website](#).

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