



Safe hair day

To keep your hair color looking fab without all those harsh chemicals, turn to gentler products. BY JENNIFER MEDLEY

Your favorite dye might make your hair look perfectly natural, but it could be far from natural itself. The chemicals used to create many conventional hair color products may pose health risks, so here's how to switch to less-toxic, just-as-effective alternatives.

HEALTH CONCERNS

The cocktail of chemicals found in most dyes on the market can be absorbed into the bloodstream through the scalp, leading to health issues like allergies, cancer, and breathing problems. The potentially dangerous ingredients include paraphenylenediamine (or PPD), ammonia, resorcinol, parabens, and synthetic fragrances. Dark dyes, with more concentrated chemicals, are especially risky.

"If you get a single process, you are basically eating the product," says Jane Webb, owner of the Grace Heaven Organic Salon in New York City. "Things are absorbed through the skin

incredibly quickly, and it all gets stored in fatty tissues."

Chemical inhalation is another concern. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, carcinogens are much more potent for infants than adults, so pregnant women should stay clear of toxic fumes like those that hair dyes emit.

John Masters, creator of the John Masters Organics hair care product line, opened his "clean air" salon, John Masters Organics, 15 years ago in New York City. His goal was to both limit the level of toxic fumes in the salon and help the planet. "Once the color is done, it's rinsed down the drain," Masters says. "All those chemicals go back into the ecosystem."

NATURAL SOLUTIONS

For less-toxic ways to keep up your color, look to permanent herbal-based products. While most of these



formulations do contain PPD (which has so far been found to be an irreplaceable coloring agent), it's in trace amounts, greatly minimizing the risk of health problems. The only 100 percent natural hair color is henna, although it can be difficult to use; for best results, ask a professional to apply it. "For people who think natural hair coloring doesn't work, I say just try it first before making a decision," Masters says. "Because it does!"

GO AU NATUREL (WELL, ALMOST)

- **FIND A LOW-CHEMICAL OPTION.** Ask your salon for less-toxic hair dyes; or find out if you can bring your own for your stylist to apply.
- **CHECK THE INGREDIENTS.** Look for minimal PPD levels (conventional products contain up to six percent PPD, but natural ones are closer to one percent) and no ammonia or resorcinol.
- **TRY A TEST FIRST.** For those with sensitive skin, do a patch test first to minimize the chance of a reaction
- **CHOOSE HIGHLIGHTS.** Whether you're using low-chemical or conventional products, you can minimize chemical absorption by opting for highlights instead of full color.
- **STICK WITH LIGHTER HUES.** The lighter the color, the less chemically concentrated the dye. ●

LOW-CHEMICAL PRODUCTS YOU CAN TRY AT HOME

These plant-based permanent hair color products are free of ammonia, resorcinol, and parabens; plus, they contain low levels of PPD (as compared to conventional products):

Herbatint
(\$14, infinitehealthresources.com)

Naturcolor
(\$15, Whole Foods Market stores nationwide)

Tints of Nature
(\$18, tintsofnatureusa.com)

If you want to go the henna route, these dyes are 100 percent plant based, with no additives, chemicals, or pesticides:

Rainbow Henna
(\$24, rainbowresearch.com)

Morocco Method
(\$10.50, moroccomethod.com)

Surya Henna Brasil
(\$10, suryabrasilproducts.com)