DDG Arbeitskreis Plastik und Nachhaltigkeit in der Dermatologie

PATIENT INFORMATION ON PARABENS

Dear Patient,

For some time now, chemicals known as parabens have been in the public spotlight. Parabens is a collective term for a large number of natural and synthetic substances, all of which are characterised by the ending “paraben”. Parabens have an antimicrobial and fungicidal effect and are therefore frequently used as preservatives in the pharmaceutical industry, in cosmetics and in certain foodstuffs. In technical applications, among other uses they are used for preserving oils, fats, glues and shoe polishes.

The most well-known synthetic parabens, of which the mechanisms of action have been analysed in a number of studies, include **butylparaben**, **propylparaben**, **methylparaben** and **ethylparaben**. Less well known are benzylparaben, isopropylparaben, isobutylparaben, pentylparaben and phenylparaben, for which there are still few reliable data. The use of some of these compounds in cosmetics is prohibited in the European Union (EU).

In **cosmetics**, **methylparaben** is primarily used in creams, lotions, make-up, lipsticks, aftershaves, deodorants, soaps, sunscreens, depilatories and shampoos. Methylparaben is highly toxic to aquatic organisms that represent a key food resource for many fish. In accordance with the European Regulation on Cosmetics, the level of methylparaben must not exceed a limit of 0.4 percent per product pack. The concern is that with every use of a care product, methylparaben can enter the wastewater unfiltered, for example through showering, washing or removing make-up and thus can enter the sea via rivers.

Parabens enter the body not only via cosmetics but also via medication and foods. In the past few years, they have been associated with a variety of undesirable side effects. Some, such as benzyl-, butyl- and propylparaben, exhibit a hormone-like structure. The suspicion, supported by studies, that they might be capable of causing breast cancer has not yet been conclusively dispelled. Over and above this, other recent studies have shown that hormone-active parabens trigger harmful effects such as reproductive disorders and the “feminisation” of males in fish, birds, reptiles, and mammals. There are also indications that these substances can cross the placenta in pregnant women, which could presumably have a harmful effect, in particular on female foetuses. In contrast, allergic reactions are rare overall.

It is estimated that parabens are currently present in over 22,000 cosmetic products worldwide.

How can you reduce or avoid the use of parabens?

- Check the ingredients of cosmetics and other common care products for parabens before purchasing them.
- The free apps CodeCheck© and ToxFox© (both German-language) allow consumers to scan products for parabens before buying.
- Ask for paraben-free products in natural cosmetic shops or health food stores.
- Avoid cosmetics purchased outside of the EU that list parabens prohibited in the EU as ingredients. The free App BeatTheMicrobeat© (English-language) can be helpful.

For more information, visit **www.akdermaplastik.de**.