

## Revamp Your Pregnancy Beauty Regimen

**Is your beauty routine safe when you're pregnant? Get insights on what changes you may want to consider.**

By Lisa Fields  
WebMD Feature

Reviewed by [Louise Chang, MD](#)

You swore off cocktails and stopped eating sushi when you found out you're [pregnant](#), but you hadn't considered the safety of your beauty products until you accidentally inhaled some hair spray this morning. Now you're wondering if you should change some of your beauty habits for the rest of your pregnancy. Maybe you're not inclined to go *au naturel*; but you want to do what's best for the [baby](#). You're just not sure what that is.

"Any material placed on the skin has the potential to be absorbed into the bloodstream and may be able to cross the placenta, so some caution is warranted," says Andrew Healy, MD, an obstetrician at Baystate Medical Center in Springfield, Mass. "However, very few substances are suspected or have been proven to be harmful to a developing pregnancy."

If you're unsure what's safe, bring specific products to your doctor for analysis, recommends John Bailey, PhD, chief scientist for the Personal Care Products Council, a trade group for the cosmetic and personal care products industry.

"At the most fundamental level, women should consult their physicians for medical advice and to discuss any concerns they may have," Bailey says.

What's safe during pregnancy? What should be avoided? Here's what doctors told WebMD.

### Teeth Whiteners

Worrisome ingredient: Peroxide

Concerned? Try peroxide-free whitening [toothpaste](#).

She still smiles as much as ever, but Monica Thomas of Akron, Ohio, thinks her [teeth](#) look dull. That's because Thomas, who's expecting her fourth child in February, stopped using tooth-whitening strips.

"I felt I could survive 40 weeks without them," she says. "I'll start again after I stop nursing."

The active ingredient, peroxide, is safe for adults, even if you swallow some during the bleaching process, says Colleen Olitsky, DMD, a cosmetic dentist in Ponte Vedra Beach, Fla. "But there's so much we don't know about how substances affect babies during pregnancy, it's wise to avoid."

**"Ingesting some peroxide is probably safe for pregnant women, but if you're concerned, use a whitening toothpaste instead," says Dayna Salasche, MD, clinical instructor of obstetrics and gynecology at Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine in Chicago. "Most importantly, continue to brush, floss, and see the dentist regularly for cleanings."**

### Hairspray, Nail Polish

Worrisome ingredient: Phthalates

Concerned? Try mousse or gel, which can't be inhaled, or phthalate-free polish.

A growing body of research suggests a possible link between phthalates (found in many products including hair spray and nail polish) and increased risk of [birth defects](#). But the FDA concluded that the available data don't establish an association between the use of phthalates in cosmetics and a human health risk.

"It's all a matter of amount used," says Judith Hellman, MD, associate clinical professor of dermatology at Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York. "A small amount of spray, applied without breathing in the fumes, is probably acceptable."

### Hairspray, Nail Polish continued...

If you're repeatedly exposed to hair spray at work, though, your baby may have an increased risk of birth defects. A recent British study showed that baby boys born to such women were two to three times more likely to have a birth defect of the [penis](#), although that study, published in *Environmental Health Perspectives* in 2008, didn't prove that hair spray was to blame.

When using nail polish, apply in a well-ventilated area to limit exposure. Once the polish dries, there's little risk to your baby, since chemicals aren't absorbed through the nails.

"Phthalates have not been connected to birth defects in humans," Healy says. "However, studies in animals have shown these substances to interfere with male sexual development, so caution is warranted."

### Sunscreen and Self-Tanner

Worrisome ingredient: Oxybenzone

Concerned? Try [sunscreen](#) with zinc oxide or titanium dioxide.

You want protection from the sun's rays but aren't sure if you should rub chemicals into your skin daily throughout pregnancy. One recent study linked the absorption of oxybenzone, a sunscreen ingredient, to low birth weight in baby girls. But that research doesn't prove that the sunscreen was to blame. And there are other options. Many sunscreens contain zinc oxide and titanium dioxide, which block UV rays by sitting atop the skin.

Feeling pale? Self-tanners haven't been studied much in pregnant women. "An occasional self-tanner will do a lot less harm than a real tan or tanning beds," Hellman says. "But for nine months, you can survive without looking bronzed."

**"Sunscreen is extremely important because pregnancy hormones can make the skin more sensitive than normal," Salasche says. "It's best to use products that block the sun without being absorbed and wear a hat and other protective clothing."**

## Acne Medication

Worrisome ingredients: [Salicylic acid](#), [benzoyl peroxide](#), retinol, retinoid

Concerned? Try glycolic peels.

[Acne](#) often worsens during pregnancy because of hormone fluctuations. But don't use your usual pimple cream if it contains retinol, benzoyl peroxide, or salicylic acid. Prescription retinoid products should also not be used.

Talk to your doctor if you're breaking out. "I prescribe topical [medications](#) that contain azelaic acid, [erythromycin](#) or [clindamycin](#)," says Jeanie Leddon, MD, PhD, a dermatologist in Lafayette, Colo. "Glycolic acid peels are also safe."

"Salicylic acid has been associated with an increased risk for [miscarriage](#) when used in the [first trimester](#)," Healy says.

## Hair Dye

Worrisome ingredients: Ammonia, peroxide

Concerned? Try highlights instead.

"Gray roots would have exposed my pregnancy at work before I was ready to tell people," says Mara Palcisco of Wilmington, N.C., who's expecting her second child in January. "So I kept dyeing my hair, even during the first trimester."

Researchers haven't examined the effects of hair dye on pregnant women, so some doctors recommend avoidance. "Dyes contain a variety of ingredients that, when ingested, fall into the poisonous category, so the rule of thumb is to avoid hair color during pregnancy," says New York dermatologist Jeannette Graf, MD. "Highlights that aren't applied to the scalp may be fine."

Other physicians are more lenient. "It's thought that only a small amount of hair-treatment chemicals are absorbed into women's skin, and this isn't enough to cause problems to the fetus," Leddon says. "As a conservative measure, avoid hair treatment for the first trimester, when the [developing fetus](#) can be most susceptible. Avoid treatments with ammonia, treat hair in a well-ventilated room, wear gloves, and rinse well immediately after treatment."

**"Hair dye has never been tested, but since it's used topically, it's considered safe for use throughout pregnancy," Salasche says.**

## Makeup

Worrisome ingredients: lead, fragrance

Concerned? Try lead-free, fragrance-free products.

Plenty of women apply foundation, lipstick, and other cosmetics first thing in the morning and leave them on until bedtime. But some makeup contains lead and other questionable ingredients.

"Pregnant women should think carefully about what they need to feel comfortable and feminine but try to not use extras," says Sean Gray, senior analyst at the Environmental Working Group, a nonprofit organization which co-founded the Campaign for Safe Cosmetics.

Lead is sometimes added to lipstick to make color long-lasting. In 2007, the Campaign for Safe Cosmetics found that 61% of brand-name lipsticks they tested contained lead. The FDA doesn't consider it to be a safety concern, since lipstick isn't ingested. But if it makes you feel better, there are lead-free lipsticks on the market.

"The contribution of lead-containing lipsticks [to lead poisoning] is unknown but probably fairly small," Healy says. "Nevertheless, it would be prudent to utilize lead-free products."

### Anti-Wrinkle Cream, Botox Cosmetic

Worrisome ingredients: retinol, [Botox Cosmetic](#)

Concerned? Use moisturizers and sunscreen instead.

With a trend toward older mothers, pregnant women may reach for wrinkle cream almost as often as stretch-mark lotion. But before massaging it into your laugh lines, consider the ingredients: Many wrinkle creams contain retinol, which has been linked to birth defects.

Some women who seek more youthful appearances get Botox Cosmetic injections to smooth furrowed brows, but experts recommend skipping such treatments during pregnancy.

**"There haven't been any conclusive studies, but the consensus is that it may be related to miscarriage or impaired growth," Salasche says.**

"There are no adequate, well-controlled studies of Botox Cosmetic in pregnant women, so administration of Botox Cosmetic is not recommended during pregnancy," Kellie Reagan, a spokeswoman for Allergan, the drug company that makes Botox Cosmetic, states in an email to WebMD.

"If a woman wants to use an anti-wrinkle cream during pregnancy, she should bring the specific product to her physician so that he or she can review the contents," Healy says.