



BEWARE THE BUGS!

"Did you know every time you dip your fingers in your pot of cream you risk infection from bacteria?"

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Have you ever used the little spatula that came with that expensive pot of anti-ageing face cream? Or do you simply scoop a dollop out of the tub? If, like most of us, you're using your fingers, at best you could have wasted your money, and at worst you could be damaging your skin.

Because every single time you dip your fingers in, you could be introducing bacteria into your cream. And, given that the ingredients of most cosmetics are quite nutritious for your average microbe, if your beauty stash sits in a nice warm bathroom cabinet, you've suddenly got the perfect breeding ground for all sorts of nasties.

'Most of us carry bacteria, such as staphylococcus aureus, on our skin,' says Dr Susan Mayou, consultant dermatologist at London's Cadogan Clinic.

'Most of the time it does us no harm at all. But introducing it to your face cream by putting your fingers in the jar can transform your cream into a culture medium, allowing these bacteria to reproduce.'

What this means is that along with your daily dose of moisturiser, you could also be getting a rather unpleasant dose of bacteria that could cause skin infections.

'This sort of thing was first noticed in eczema patients who regularly apply cream to their skin,' says Dr Mayou. **'It became apparent that they were constantly re-infecting themselves. That's the reason you no longer see emollient creams in big, old-fashioned, screw-top jars; they're far more likely to be in pump dispensers.'**

Beauty gurus insist that after you've had an eye infection, you should throw away your make-up so you don't keep re-infecting yourself.

Similarly, if you find that every time you get rid of one outbreak of spots, you get another, the combination of grubby fingers and your moisturiser could be to blame.

But as well as giving yourself spots, you might also be rendering your costly cream utterly impotent.

'The presence of bacteria in a cream can change its pH [how acid or alkaline it is],' says Dr Mayou.

'Some of the active ingredients that you find in expensive cosmeceuticals will only work at a specific pH.'

'So if you've contaminated it, you may have wiped out any of the potential benefits that the cream could offer your skin.' Los Angeles-based facialist Kate Somerville was so concerned about these potential problems that when she launched her own line of products (at SpaceNK.co.uk), she concentrated as much on the packaging as the contents.

'Having worked as a facialist I understood the importance of sanitation and I really wanted to make a concerted effort to ensure that my products, as far as possible, upheld the same hygiene standards that I insist upon in my clinic,' says Kate.

The packaging is innovative airless pump dispensers, which Kate believes offer several advantages over tubs.

'Not only are the products protected from bacterial contamination, they're also protected from oxidation, which would make them less effective. Due to this, we can use fewer preservatives.'

But while packaging can protect us, and our creams, to a certain extent, as consumers we still have to take some responsibility for how we use a product.

Susan Mayou cautions that if your skin comes into contact with any part of the packaging, such as the nozzle, you could still come up against similar problems.

'Ideally, you want to be pumping the product so it falls onto your hand. You shouldn't be sticking your finger against the nozzle.'