



Behind the label:

## Nivea Moisturising Lotion, Are we being naïve about Nivea?

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The Ecologist, [theecologist.org](http://theecologist.org)  
1st June 2006

Are we being naïve about nivea? By Pat Thomas

**INGREDIENTS:** Paraffinum liquidum, PEG-150, methylparaben, butylparaben, ethylparaben, isobutylparaben, propylparaben, simethicone, BHT, parfum, limonene, geraniol, linalool, hydroxycitronellal, hydroxyisohexyl 3-cyclohexane carboxaldehyde, citronellol.

It's a name we all grew up with. In some form or another Nivea – the world's first water-in-oil cream – has been the most popular and trusted hand and body lotion since it first emerged in 1911.

In recent years the range has expanded to include a baffling number of sub-brands, including colour cosmetics, facial skin care, body care, hair care, hand care, men's lines, children's products, sun protection, baby products, bath care, deodorants and lip care. But it's the famous blue bottle of lotion (along with the little tin of crème) that most of us think of when we think Nivea.

Nivea is made by international cosmetics and toiletry giant Biersdorf and is sold in some 150 countries. Very specific marketing tactics mean that wherever it is sold Nivea is perceived as a 'local' brand. It's a strategy that has paid off. In 2004 Nivea accounted for £2.7 billion of Biersdorf's £3.8 billion sales.

British consumers spent around £631m on skincare products in 2003. Fuelled by consumers' desire to look good regardless of their age. And, regardless of what it costs, this figure is set to rise by £100m by 2008.

Nivea's ingredients are, sadly, not very different from commercial hand and body lotions in all price ranges all over the world. But it does not yet use nanotechnology: the ultimate achievement in penetration enhancing ingredients that bypass the skin's protective barrier and pass more deeply into the body and bloodstream. So it may be a relatively 'safe' choice.

Nevertheless, given the trust that women have put into Nivea over the years, it's dismaying to see just what goes into the bottle. Along with semi-synthetic fatty acids and waxes, many of which do not have full safety data, Nivea lotion contains the full complement of oestrogenic parabens, contact allergens and penetration enhancers, five potential carcinogens, perfume, and even extra fragrance ingredients. In fact, one third of the listed ingredients are fragrances that are known irritants and sensitisers – chemicals that, with repeated exposure, can trigger allergic reactions. Once a person is sensitised even the smallest exposure can trigger a response.

#### Effects

**Paraffinum liquidum:** Lubricant emollient. Also known as mineral oil. A cheap ingredient that produces a temporary moisturising effect. Penetration enhancer. Prolonged contact destroys the natural oily barrier of the skin, leading to dryness. Can be contaminated with polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs). Some PAHs are potential human carcinogens.

**PEG-150:** Acts as a thickener, solvent, emulsifier and surfactant: Penetration enhancer; skin irritation. May be contaminated with 1,4-dioxane and ethylene oxide, impurities linked to breast cancer

**Methylparaben, butylparaben, ethylparaben, isobutylparaben, propylparaben:** Preservatives. Skin irritation; contact dermatitis; contact allergies. Parabens are oestrogen mimics: butylparaben and isobutylparaben have the strongest effect, followed by propylparaben, ethylparaben and methylparaben. Excess oestrogen is a trigger for cancers of the breast, ovary, uterus and testicles and may have effects on foetal development. Recently, scientists conducted an analysis of breast cancer tissue and found accumulated parabens in every sample.

**Simethicone:** Synthetic silicone-based moisturiser; film former. Skin irritation; film formers trap other substances (including other ingredients in the product) beneath them, and because they do not allow the skin to breathe they may exacerbate skin irritation caused by sweat or other substances.

**BHT:** Antioxidant. Contact allergies/dermatitis; potential carcinogen; may cause birth defects.

**Parfum:** Fragrance. Allergenic; triggers asthmatic reactions; skin irritation; central nervous system disruption; artificial musks and phthalates (common fragrance ingredients) are hormone-disrupting and potential carcinogens.

**Limonene:** Synthetic fragrance. A common pesticide in flea-control products, causes skin and eye irritation; powerful sensitiser; may trigger asthma attacks; produces tumours, reproductive abnormalities and delayed growth in some animals.

**Geraniol:** Synthetic fragrance. Irritating to skin and eyes; a sensitiser.

**Linalool:** Synthetic fragrance. Skin, eye and respiratory irritation; in animals causes CNS disorders affecting muscle control.

**Hydroxycitronellal:** Synthetic fragrance. A contact allergen and skin, eye and lung irritant.

**Hydroxyisohexyl 3-cyclohexane carboxaldehyde:** Synthetic fragrance. A contact allergen and sensitiser; worsens eczema in two to three per cent of sufferers.

**Citronellol:** Synthetic fragrance. Also used as a pesticide, a severe skin irritant. Butylphenyl methylpropional Synthetic fragrance Skin irritant. Use is restricted in both leave-on and wash-off products due to powerful sensitisation potential. In animals, skin applications at high concentrations caused sperm damage and CNS effects.

#### Alternatives

Healthy skin does not need lots of gunk put on it. If your skin is persistently dry, in spite of your using moisturisers, your skincare products may actually be the cause of the problem. When a moisturiser is necessary, vegetable and biological oils are a better choice