



Miamoo fact sheets:

Sodium Lauryl Sulphate

What are they?

Sodium lauryl sulphate (SLS) is an anionic surfactant (detergent) which is included as a foaming agent (to clean and make bubbles) in a huge variety of commonly used products. These include shampoos, soaps, face and body washes, toothpaste, washing up & laundry detergents and also industrial cleansing chemicals such as engine degreasers.

How can I recognise them on a product label?

There are many derivatives of SLS that can be found in commercial preparations, including:

- sodium laureth sulphate,
- sodium laureth-3 sulphate,
- DEA or TEA sodium lauryl sulphate.

Although these derivatives may vary slightly in mildness, the general action and effects are essentially similar.

Why are they potentially harmful to babies?

A report published in the Journal of The American College of Toxicology in 1983 showed that concentrations as low as 0.5% could cause:

- Irritation
- and concentrations of 10-30% caused
- Skin corrosion
 - Severe irritation

It also goes onto state that SLS was also linked with:

- Eye irritations and deformities in children
- Hormone imbalance
- Protein denaturing (disturbs the protein structure in our cells)

The report states,

“Sodium Lauryl Sulfate is an anionic surfactant used in cosmetics and industrial chemicals as a cleansing agent. In absorption, metabolism and excretion studies Sodium Lauryl Sulfate had a degenerative effect on the cell membranes because of its protein denaturing properties. High levels of skin penetration may occur at even low use concentration.”
(JOURNAL OF THE AMERICAN COLLEGE OF TOXICOLOGY. Volume 2. Number 7, 1983, Final Report on the Safety, Assessment of Sodium Lauryl Sulfate)

As we are exposed to SLS in everyday products like toothpaste, hand washes, face wash, shower and bath gel, washing up liquid and powder, the levels in our bodies can build up and potentially cause us harm. It is therefore sensible to try and find products that do not contain SLS ingredients.

Why do manufacturers use SLS?

- It is cheap and cost effective
- Manufacturers market the “foaming” properties of a product to introduce fun at bathtime for children
- As consumers we have been led to believe that if a product does not foam it can't be good at cleaning and it's therefore cheap – the reverse of this is true.

How to be informed about what you are putting on your baby's skin

- Know the ingredients that are potentially harmful
- Read the Label and check for the nasties
- Don't be duped by words and imagery on packaging like, “natural, organic, gentle, tear free, calming, soothing, hypoallergenic, dermatologically tested, pure.
- Introduce a toy into the bath water for fun rather than rely on synthetic bubbles that can potentially harm delicate skin.
- Don't use products on your baby just because your mum did – times and products have changed.
- Don't always buy something because it's cheap – it may save pennies but could