

Zero chemicals; hero toiletries!

You get up in the morning, brush your teeth, and gargle with your mouth wash, all the while thinking about the lunch meeting and dinner party you have ahead. After that, you jump in the shower, shampoo and condition those locks, and wash your body with a shower gel/soap.

By now, your thoughts may have switched to the latest episode of Black Mirror. You come out of the shower and dry yourself.

Your skin now feels like a baked potato that's been left in the oven for far too long. You re-moisturise with all sorts of lotion, potion, and emotion, and seal off those sweat glands under your arm with deodorant.

The face has its own daily routine. If you are a man, then you shave it with your favourite shaving cream, and apply that musky after shave lotion that your lady friend loves so much. If you are a woman, then that routine is extra long — scrub this, peel that, wear a pack, take it off.

What we do not realise during this seemingly benign process of self-grooming and cleaning is that we have just potentially exposed ourselves to a multitude of toxins, chemicals, and heavy metals, which have long been linked to severe long-term health consequences, including cancer and hormonal imbalances.

Some of these chemicals, such as palm oil, also have devastating environmental effects.

My quest to finding alternatives to chemical toiletries started with my journey towards veganism. I was no longer comfortable with using products that were tested on animals and/or

TOLUENE

Toluene is a toxic chemical commonly found in nail products and hair dyes. It is also listed on labels as benzene, toluol, phenylmethane, or methylbenzene. Toluene can affect the respiratory and central nervous systems, damage the liver and kidneys, and cause birth defects and spontaneous abortion.

FRAGRANCE

Most cosmetics and other personal care products contain scents, which are typically labelled as 'fragrances,' and do not include the list of chemicals they are comprised of. Fragrances can contribute to air pollution and health issues such as hormone disruption, asthma, allergies, and migraines.

PARABENS

Parabens are oestrogen-mimicking preservatives found in many cosmetics and other body-care products. A study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention showed that most of the participants tested for paraben exposure came up positive. Studies have shown a potential link between paraben exposure and the proliferation of breast cancer cells.

VITAMIN A!

Vitamin A is important for your health, but it is fat soluble and can also be dangerous if you accumulate too much in your tissues. Consuming too much in supplement form is only one way that you can accumulate toxic levels. These days, cosmetics and lotions can also contain different forms of vitamin A.

An assessment conducted through the Norwegian Scientific Committee for Food Safety showed that excessive exposure to vitamin A can increase risk

products and other merchandise, from shower curtains to wood finishes. Most Americans tested by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey during 2003 to 2004 showed the metabolites of several phthalates in their urine. Phthalates are considered toxic to normal development and the reproductive system, and can potentially cause endocrine disruption and cancer.

So, what can be done? My own shower caddy had more traffic jam than Dhaka streets. I used to take great pleasure in my lavender bath salt, my raspberry shower gel, and my 'winter fresh' deodorant. I needed to have those particular products of some particular brands, who did not give a hoot about my health or my safety to feel clean and beautiful. Mindless consumerism at its best! I ditched chemical toiletries three years ago. When I tell people that I no longer use shampoo, soap, or toothpaste, people automatically assume that I walk around with body odour, bad breath, and yellow teeth.

The transition took some time, preparation, and commitment, but the outcome of it liberated me and restored my hair and skin from damage, which seemed irreversible at the time.

My hair used to be dry, easy to tangle, and my scalp was flakier than Dhaka bakarkhani. My skin was also chaffed, and anything I used aggravated my eczema.

All I had to do was stop using commercial products to gain back the health of my hair and skin. I also came to realise how these chemical products

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years since I said bye-bye to a blue bottle, and my scalp thanked me by saying bye-bye to dandruff. Prepping your hair for the el natural treatment will need to be done in two steps.

Step #1

Remove all the build-up in your hair from years of shampooing, conditioning, colouring, using gel, hair spray, etc. The easiest and most effective way to do it is to drench your hair in apple cider vinegar and wash it with warm water. Dilute one part of apple cider vinegar in three parts of water. Dab a cotton ball in the liquid and apply on your scalp and hair, from tip to end. Make sure your hair is fully drenched!

Leave it on for half an hour and then rinse it with cold water. Do this three times a week for two weeks.

Step #2

For regular cleansing, there is a number of things I tried, starting from chickpea flour, to tamarind water, to soap nut (reetha). I have finally opted for a mixture of multani mati and baking powder, followed by an apple cider vinegar rinse. When I travel, I take a bottle of natural shampoo by a local company named Parmeeda.

Method

Mix 4-6 tablespoons of multani mati and ¼ teaspoon of baking soda in lukewarm water, and make a paste. Wet your hair thoroughly. Massage the mix into your scalp. Rinse thoroughly. Condition your hair with the apple cider vinegar mix. Multani mati has its own natural oil, so if you have oily hair, then you can substitute it with chickpea flour. Make sure the chickpea flour has no clumps when being turned into a paste, or its residues will stick to your hair. Sieve the flour before mixing to avoid clumps.

For conditioner, mix 1-2 tablespoon of apple cider vinegar in 1 litre of water, and rinse your hair with it for silky, soft hair.

After wash, you can take a few drops of your favourite essential oil and massage your hair thoroughly for a subtle, natural aroma.

Disclaimer —

Natural hair treatments do not give you the temporary fluffiness that you may be used to. Remember that fluff is just fluff! Your aim is to restore the natural oil, and pH level of your hair, which will ultimately give you strong, healthy, and beautiful tresses. This will take a bit of time (2-4 weeks), so be patient, stick to the programme, and pray to the hair goddess for forgiveness.

DEODORANT

When it comes to health effects, aluminium and parabens (discussed earlier) are the two main buzzwords that pop up as posing a potential risk. The active ingredient found in antiperspirants is aluminium chloride, a salt compound that works by blocking the sweat duct and stopping secretions coming out of the sweat gland. Remember that you need your sweat glands to be open and free to release toxins. If you seal them off, then your body odour will only get worse and you will notice it when you are not using deodorants.

This natural deodorant recipe absorbs sweat as opposed to blocking them, neutralises the odour, and even leaves you smelling fresh.

Ingredients

½ cup corn starch
½ tsp baking soda (reduce the amount further if this irritates your skin)
½ cup coconut oil
4-5 drops of lavender oil

Method

Mix all the ingredients together until you have a paste. Store in a shallow container. Apply the paste under your arm once a day.

TOOTHPASTE

Ingredients

½ cup multani mati
½ tsp salt, ½ tsp baking soda
½ cup coconut oil
10-12 drops of peppermint oil

Method

Mix all the ingredients well and store in a shallow container. You only need a tiny amount of this mix to brush your teeth.

By Rubaiya Ahmad
Location and product: Mermaid Beach Resort



contained palm oil.

The products I used were also packaged in plastic, which is also something I wanted to avoid. I started doing my research and what I found out was terrifying! There are seven most commonly used chemicals that were present in pretty much all the commercial toiletries and cosmetics and the products I was using.

TRICLOSAN

Found in soaps and toothpastes, triclosan is a widely used antimicrobial pesticide; in fact it's so widely used that there is concern that triclosan could be contributing to making bacteria resistant to antibiotics. Triclosan not only irritates the skin; it may also promote cancer and disrupt the endocrine system.

of birth defects, osteoporosis, and skin irritation.

Another study through the National Toxicology Program found that topical vitamin A cream increased the development of skin cancer and tumours in mice under solar light.

BUTYLATED HYDROXYANISOLE (BHA)

The European Union deemed butylated hydroxyanisole (BHA) unsafe for use in fragrance, but BHA can still be found in cosmetics and other personal care products in the United States. The National Toxicology Program considers BHA a carcinogen, and animal studies have indicated it damages the reproductive system.

PHTHALATES

Found in hundreds of personal care

are made to keep you dependent on them. Before switching to natural toiletries, I would need to wash my hair 3-4 times a week just to keep it from getting oily. The toothpaste left my mouth minty fresh, but just for a few hours. After all, we all know we are supposed to brush our teeth at least twice, if not three times a day. How else will the toothpaste industry sustain itself?

Switching to homemade toiletries had other surprising benefits. I started saving thousands of takas every month (in fact, I was able to go on a vacation from the money I saved), my bathroom became clean and clutter free, and I was producing zero plastic waste!

Additionally, since the homemade products do not interfere with the skin

and hair's natural pH level, I did not need to wash my hair so often or apply lotion after bathing. My beauty/personal hygiene routine became super short and easy with a few one-step methods. Not having to obsess over my own skin and hair so much also grounded me, made me feel more feminine and in touch with myself.

So now that you are all pumped up, how should you start making your own products?

It's easier than you think. Everything you need to make your basic shampoo, soap, toothpaste and deodorant are right there in your kitchen. My motto is – if you can't put it in your mouth, then you should not put it on your mouth.

If you want to make your products a little fancy and festive, then do invest in some good quality essential oils. Essential oils are a little expensive, but a tiny bottle goes a very long way, and you will still end up saving a lot of money.

I have a wide range of essential oils simply because I am obsessed with them, but you can start with some peppermint oil and some lavender oil. Below are the recipes of my homemade toiletries. Try it, for the sake of your health, for the sake of environment, and for the sake of animals.

SOAP

While commercial soaps can effectively remove dirt and germs from your skin, it can also remove the natural oils secreted by your skin. If you use harsh soaps too frequently, your skin may feel dry and rough. Some soaps are more drying than others, and some are even abrasive or irritating. This can age your skin prematurely.

The natural alternative

Ingredients

½ cup multani mati
½ cup chandan powder
½ cup coconut oil, 1 tsp baking soda

Method

Mix all ingredients together, put it in a pretty jar, and use as soap. This will leave your skin clean, hydrated, and moisturised. You can also add rose water, upton, and turmeric in the mix if you want. You can omit/reduce the amount of coconut oil if you have oily skin.

SHAMPOO

This took some work!

You may also find yourself struggling a little before you find a solution that you are happy with. I used to have brittle, oily hair, with stubborn dandruff. Letting go of my dandruff shampoo wasn't easy. But it's been three