



# Allergenic fragrances in cosmetic products



More than 2500 fragrance ingredients are used in consumer goods such as detergents and cleaning products, cosmetic products, aromatherapy, and herbal products. These can be derived from natural sources or chemical synthesis. It is estimated that between 1 and 3% of the European population is allergic to some fragrance ingredients. In the EU, since 2003, a series of 26 fragrance ingredients identified as allergenic have to be identified on the label of consumer products, which is important to consumers who are sensitive to these allergens. Now a new series of allergenic ingredients were identified.

## → WHAT KIND OF PROBLEMS CAN BE CAUSED BY FRAGRANCE INGREDIENTS?

When in contact with the skin, some fragrance ingredients can produce irritations, usually resulting redness of the skin or rashes. There can also be a more severe, allergic reaction called eczema which is a reaction of the immune system. Once an allergy is triggered by a first contact to an allergenic ingredient, it is a lifelong condition which re-appears when the person is exposed again to the same substance. The reaction depends on the person affected, the nature of the ingredient and the amount used, which may be very small. Some fragrance ingredients do not cause allergic reactions as such but can be chemically transformed on the skin in the presence

of air, sunlight or also by biochemical reactions inside the body, and these modified forms may then cause allergic reactions.

## → ARE THE FRAGRANCES THAT CAN TRIGGER ALLERGIES IDENTIFIED?

Since the first 26 fragrance allergens were identified, more fragrance substances have been shown to trigger allergic reactions. Based on the review available and on multiple cases of allergy reported by dermatologists, the European Scientific Committee on Consumer Safety (SCCS) identified 82 substances (54 chemicals and 28 natural extracts) that can be categorised as "*established contact allergens*" in humans, including the 26 that were already on the list. Based on the combined results from animal experiments and the analysis of their chemical structure, 26 other individual chemicals were categorised as "*likely contact allergens*". In addition, 35 individual chemicals and 13 natural extracts were also categorised as "*possible contact allergens*". Three further specific substances were recognized as "*potent allergens*" and not considered safe in consumer products. The SCCS recommends that these ingredients, as well as those that could be "activated" into allergenic substances should be added to the list of allergenic ingredients that consumer should be made aware of when present in cosmetic products.

## → CAN A SAFE LIMIT AMOUNT OF ALLERGENS BE SET FOR ALLERGENIC INGREDIENTS IN COSMETIC PRODUCTS?

For some substances which have been shown to cause a high number of allergies, the opinion of the Scientific Committee is that, if no thresholds for safe use can be established for the ingredients and natural extracts of concern, an exposure level in cosmetic products of less than 0,01% or less (or 10 mg/100g of cosmetic product) would prevent allergic reactions in the majority of cases. The SCCS also identified primary and secondary prevention measures, from prohibition to information, that could limit or eliminate exposure to fragrance allergens.

This fact sheet is based on the scientific opinion on "**Fragrance allergens in cosmetic products**" adopted on 26-27 June 2012 by the independent European Scientific Committee on Consumer Safety.

The detailed and nuanced view of the European Scientific Committee on Emerging and Newly Identified Health Risks on this issue is available at:

[http://ec.europa.eu/health/scientific\\_committees/consumer\\_safety/docs/sccs\\_o\\_102.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/health/scientific_committees/consumer_safety/docs/sccs_o_102.pdf)



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