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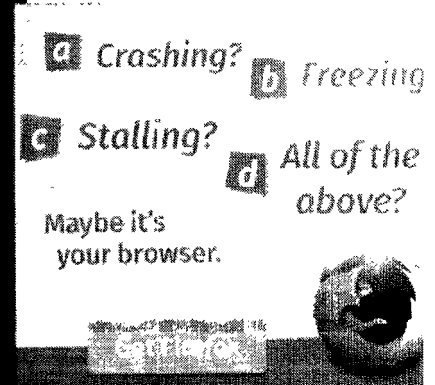
The Dangerous History of Talcum Powder



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From
Talcum
to Beauty



It can be easy to ignore safety warnings when it comes to our most coveted beauty products, including those soothing talc-based powders. But this week's headline-grabbing verdict — that Johnson & Johnson was to pay \$72 million in damages to the family of a woman whose death from ovarian cancer was linked to her use of the company's body powders — has been a rousing wake-up call.

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"There's been concerning evidence about talc — that it brings about a 30 percent increased risk of ovarian and endometrial cancers — for quite a while," Sharima Rasanayagam, director of science at the Breast Cancer Fund and head of its Campaign for Safe Cosmetics, tells Yahoo Beauty, citing a number of studies. "It's a small increase for a rare cancer — not

like smoking

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reason people haven't taken notice of it. But we take a precautionary approach, especially because it's not a product you need to be using. Why increase your risk for these cancers at all?"

Talc — a mineral substance that's either mined or produced industrially — is used in various cosmetic and beauty products, from baby powders to eye shadows, in order to absorb moisture, or as a softening or anti-caking agent. It can sometimes be contaminated with asbestos. And it's why an ever-increasing panoply of talc-free powders — from the Honest Company, Burt's Bees, Crabtree & Evelyn, and even Johnson & Johnson itself — has been become available, typically with alternative ingredients such as cornstarch, silk powders, and finely milled oats.

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In the Johnson & Johnson verdict, announced Monday in the St. Louis circuit court, it was noted by jurors that the company failed for decades to warn consumers about the risks of talc in order to boost its sales. Damages were awarded to the family of Jacqueline Fox, who had used Johnson & Johnson baby powder and Shower to Shower powder for 50 years.

In its defense, the company released a statement noting that the verdict "goes against decades of sound science proving the safety of talc as a cosmetic ingredient in multiple products. ..." And on its website, Johnson & Johnson notes that "the talc used in all our global products is carefully selected and processed to be asbestos-free, and we confirm this with regular testing. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has also tested and confirmed the purity of our talc."

Photo: AP

Still, according to the Environmental Working Group (EWG), “studies by the National Toxicology Panel demonstrated that cosmetic-grade talc free of asbestos is a form of magnesium silicate that also can be toxic and carcinogenic.” Also, notes EWG, a March 1976 Food and Drug Administration memo obtained by Fair Warning under the Freedom of Information Act “charged that cosmetics makers had been lax in monitoring the safety of talc supplies.”

Many point out that while studies about talc risks may indeed have been observational rather than able to prove absolute cause-and-effect, they have not ruled out danger out either.

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