

On Line: Cosmetic Overview

It seems that everybody and her aunt is currently selling **Nu Skin** cosmetics. I've even been approached by enthusiastic people asking me if I would be interested in becoming a distributor! We have had so many inquiries about these products that they were clearly the perfect choice for this column. Unfortunately, it was almost impossible to get any cooperation from the **Nu Skin** corporate offices.

After many phone calls and faxes to Bonnie Garrett, Regional Administrator of Marketing, in Provo, Utah, I was told that "because of security reasons, we will be unable to provide a list [of ingredients] for you. Each of our products does contain a list of its ingredients on the label." However, the sample products kindly provided by a local distributor did not list any ingredients. I was finally able to obtain photocopies of the ingredient listings for several products from an unhappy **Nu Skin** customer who sent them to me for analysis - so that I could tell her what had made her skin break out.

The **Nu Skin** brochure boasts that their products offer "the secret of youth." However, they are composed of only the most basic and commonly used cellular-renewal ingredients, such as aloe vera and hyaluronic acid. These are no "secret," and in fact have been the basis for many natural cosmetics for decades. The products should contain more than this in the way of natural cellular-renewal ingredients to justify such claims. They do contain carbomer 940 and propylene glycol as primary ingredients. These are not beneficial to the skin, nor are they natural, and they are certainly not secret.

At first glance, the claims certainly do not match the ingredients: "We all have the potential to look younger; it is just a matter of what we do about it. All **Nu Skin** products are designed to bring out your best in a way Mother Nature would approve by using All of the Good, None of the Bad." I beg to differ. For example: the **Rejuvenating Cream** has a base of aloe Vera, which is good; but it also contains propylene glycol as a primary ingredient (it's listed fifth out of an ingredient listing of thirty five

ingredients, and can be irritating at this high a level). In the same product, the few ingredients with the most potential to be beneficial - vitamins A, D, and E, biotin, panthenol, and royal jelly - are listed last, after the preservatives, indicating that only minute amounts are included. The same product also contains fragrance (as do five of the other skin care products), even though the company claims "no potentially harmful coloring agents or fragrance" in any products. Three of the skin care products also contain FD&C colors.

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But my biggest bone of contention with this product (and with ten of their other skin care products) is their claim that it contains human placental extract. When I queried Rita Gates, a cosmetic chemist with over twenty years experience in formulating cosmetics, she said that "human

placental extract is rarely used any more because it is a very high-risk raw material. People initially used it in cosmetics because of the reports by delivery room nurses that the protective coating on babies had a softening effect on their hands. However, the effectiveness of this naturally protective substance diminishes almost immediately following birth and is very difficult to stabilize and preserve. By the time placenta is processed, it is virtually useless. There are many other ingredients that are more effective, safer to use, and not as controversial as human placental extract. To the best of my knowledge, there is also only one lab in the United States that still offers this substance." I then called the lab, Gattefosse, in New York, and spoke with Mr. Massier, who told me that he had been contacted by **Nu Skin** two years ago regarding human placental extract, but that he had never heard from them again and has never supplied them with that product. Neither Mr. Massier nor Mrs. Gates knew of another supplier of this ingredient. This would lead me to believe that either the extract being used is in fact from a bovine source, or that no extract is being used at all. If I were a distributor or user of this product, I would certainly want to know the source of an ingredient being given so much

importance by the company. Considering the animal-rights issue, it's hard to believe that anyone would incorporate placental extract into a cosmetic, especially when there is absolutely no proof that it is beneficial when topically applied to the skin. The product also contains elastin, which is extracted from bovine sources.

Of the other products that we looked at, ten more also list human placental extract - the **Face Lift**, the **Enhancer**, the **Cleansing Lotion**, the **pH Balance**, the **NaPCA Moisturizer**, the **Lift Activator**, the **Clay Pack**, the **Hand Lotion**, the **Body Smoother**, and **Sunright 15 Sunblock**. The **Enhancer**, "a soothing ritual," contains water and aloe vera in a base of carbomer 940, a synthetic polymer with no benefit to the skin. It also contains a substantial amount of glycerin, which can draw moisture from the skin if used in higher than 20 percent of a formulation. Glycerin is fourth in the ingredient listing, indicating that it could easily be around 20 percent of the formulation; but since the company would not furnish me with any information, I could not verify the percentages.

The **NaPCA Moisture Mist** seems the best made product that we looked at. It contains water and aloe vera with NaPCA (the skin's natural moisturizing factor), glycerin, and hyaluronic acid (from bovine sources). It does contain propylene glycol, but not as high up on the listing as it is in the other products of the line. The brochure's claim that "regular use helps control fine lines and wrinkles by replenishing much needed moisture" may actually be true, since both aloe vera and hyaluronic acid boost cellular production and healing. It will also help to prevent dehydration which emphasizes fine lines and wrinkles.

In general, **Nu Skin** products are no better than many department-store or mass-market "natural" brands. They also contain questionable ingredients such as human placental extract, collagen, elastin, and hyaluronic acid from cows. Many contain propylene glycol as a primary ingredient. This is neither natural nor beneficial.

The company calls the collagen they use "avian collagen," in an attempt to distinguish it from ordinary collagen extracted from cows. "Avian" in this case refers to chickens. Regardless of the source and regardless of

whether it is "soluble collagen" or not, the molecules are too big to penetrate any deeper than the most superficial layers of skin - as any chemist or physician will confirm. Rubbing collagen on the skin to repair wrinkles or increase cell growth is about as effective as rubbing a cream containing crushed bones on the skin to heal a fracture! The only benefit collagen has on the skin is as a source of protein-- it helps to protect the skin by aiding in the retention of water.

Nu Skin's cleansers contain the most commonly used detergents - sodium laureth sulfate, sodium lauryl sulfate, cocamidopropyl betaine, and sodium c-14-16 olafin sulfonate, which strip the skin of its natural oils and cause dryness.

I was particularly offended by the company's cosmetic ingredient dictionary, which describes several dozen chemicals as being "derived from agricultural bi-products," or as 'a derivative chemical from coconut oil," in an attempt to make them sound organic as well as benign.

Such descriptions are not only inaccurate, they are simplistic and misleading.

Finally, my office has received several complaints from purchasers of **Nu Skin** products regarding the lack of service. One woman invested \$180 in products that made her break out. When she attempted to return the products, she was told that the 'guarantee was extended for three days only," and the seller returned only ten percent of her investment. We also received a report from a woman who owns a Marin County

spa in which the products are sold. This woman does not use the products herself.

Nu Skin appears to offer a way for untrained laypersons to make money selling cosmetics. As with all mass-market cosmetic companies, the training received involves how to sell the product, not how to treat an individual's personal skin problems or needs. In my opinion, the products range from ordinary (and therefore, overpriced) to not very good and possibly problem causing. Anyone wishing to buy and use products free of animal-derived ingredients and by-products will not want to choose **Nu Skin**.

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