
TRACES OF HEAVY METALS

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WHAT ARE HEAVY METALS?

'Heavy metals' are metal trace elements associated with human or environmental toxicity. While there is no technical or scientific definition or any precise list, trace elements such as lead, arsenic, cadmium, mercury, chrome, nickel, selenium, antimony, barium and cobalt are considered heavy metals. Heavy metals are present in the earth's crust. Some are present in the water, air and food and are the subject of particular monitoring. Some metal trace elements (selenium, copper, chrome III) are essential at low concentrations to the functions of living organisms, including humans. A deficiency in certain trace elements may also induce serious health problems.

WHY ARE HEAVY METAL TRACES FOUND IN COSMETIC PRODUCTS?

Heavy metals are not used as ingredients in cosmetic products. Certain metal trace elements are prohibited by current international regulations. The presence of very small quantities or traces of heavy metals is nonetheless tolerated in cosmetic products insofar as they are not harmful to human health. The traces often derive from impurities in certain synthetic or natural raw materials (colorants, pigments, opalescent materials) or from the product manufacturing, storage or packaging process. The presence of those traces is considered inevitable at technical level. The presence of lead traces in lipsticks is frequently the subject of particular attention.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL RISKS?

When heavy metals are absorbed continuously via the diet and water or by breathing highly polluted air, the heavy metals may gradually accumulate in the human body, inducing serious poisoning and various chronic diseases. Thus, excess lead intake gives rise to lead poisoning while cadmium may induce lesions of the kidneys and liver. Form VI of chrome is highly carcinogenic while form III is an essential trace element.

HOW ARE THE HEAVY METAL LEVELS IN OUR COSMETIC PRODUCTS CONTROLLED?

We do not use heavy metals as ingredients in our cosmetic products. In order to control the presence of inevitable traces of heavy metals in certain products, a large-scale program for the selection and analytical characterization of our susceptible raw materials has been set up. We also control our manufacturing processes. We also ask our raw material suppliers to comply with very strict standards for the principal heavy metals liable to be present. Obviously, we comply with the current international regulations, which define the maximum concentrations of certain heavy metals, which are not to be exceeded in cosmetic products. We always use lower limits than those defined by the regulations.

By way of an example, the lead traces that may subsist in some of our lipsticks are extremely small and not associated with any consumer health hazard. The lead traces related to application of a lipstick constitute a quantity 500 to 1000 times lower than the quantity deriving from daily intake of drinking water.

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