



## Cosmetic fragrance allergy

It is now estimated that there are over 5,000 fragrances being used today. As a result, exposures to fragrances are on the rise. Many dermatologists believe this is causing an increase in fragrance allergy. Frequency of sensitization to fragrance allergens is now seen in 1-4 % of the general population, and 8-15 % of contact dermatitis patients. Fragrances are the cosmetic ingredients most likely to cause allergic contact dermatitis. They account for 30-45 % of allergic reactions in cosmetics.

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Clinically, the main skin sites affected by fragrance related allergic contact dermatitis are the face, neck, hands and axillae (underarms).<sup>2</sup>

For patients with contact dermatitis in whom fragrance sensitivity is suspected, patch testing is the standard diagnostic tool.<sup>1</sup> A dermatologist or allergist can perform patch testing.

Once you have been diagnosed with fragrance allergy, or even suspect you are fragrance sensitive, it is important to avoid all fragranced products. This can be difficult in that many cosmetic and skin care products that are labeled "unscented" or even "fragrance free" may still contain fragrance components, sometimes called masking fragrances. The purpose of a masking fragrance is to cover up any offensive odors that may naturally occur in a product. In recent years some personal care products such as lotions and soaps have been marketed as being "unscented" or "fragrance free" yet they contain herbal ingredients or oils from botanicals. Offending allergens include rose oil, vanilla, and sweet almond oil.<sup>3</sup>

Finding truly fragrance free personal care products can be challenging. In a recent study of 179 shampoos,

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contained fragrance. Of the nine that did not contain fragrance, four contained potential allergens related to fragrance including botanical extracts and benzyl alcohol.

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Consulting with a dermatologist or allergist can be helpful in identifying fragrance allergy, understanding fragrance allergy, and selecting the right fragrance free soaps, shampoos, lotions and other personal care items.