Demystifying Skin Care for Massage Therapists

I. Product ingredients and how products are made:

Making its way from raw goods supplier to manufacturer to distributor and eventually to your bathroom shelf, a lot goes in to making a skin and body care product. These ingredients have a myriad of functions such as to thicken or thin, stabilize, preserve, make sudsy or creamy, carry, or penetrate deeply into the skin or leave the skin feeling smoother, more hydrated, or less oily.

The following is a list of product ingredients that are used quite often to make the products we put on our bodies. According to Dr. Mercola, (www.mercola.com), our bodies absorb about 5 pounds of body product chemicals per year. It stands to reason that we should pay attention to what we put on our body and our clients body. Being able to sort through the maize of healthy vs. unhealthy ingredients is a daunting task!

Emulsifiers (& Thickeners): The majority of creams and lotions that are on the market today are emulsion systems consisting of an oil phase and a water phase. Skincare emulsions can either be O/W (oil in water) or W/O (water in oil) based, the latter being the most popular in the industry.

Emulsifiers play a huge part in skincare formulation due to the importance of selecting the right emulsion for the formulation in question. The type of emulsifier not only has major impact on the product stability but also on product consistency, pH, thickness and how the product feels on the skin. Emulsifiers can also be useful when dissolving some actives. Thickeners can be used to create water based, gel like serums.

There are also certain emulsifiers that have been designed specifically for O/W and W/O systems so this is also an important factor to keep in mind when formulating a new product. Emulsifiers, like other oil-based products can be heat sensitive after reaching a certain temperature. If the emulsifier/s are added to the water phase when they are too hot the emulsion may not correctly form.

Here is a partial list of emulsifiers and thickeners:

Cetyl Dimethicone
Cetyl Alcohol
Carnauba Wax
Carbomer
Caprylic Acid (coconut)
Caprylic/Capric Triglyceride

Caproic Acid (Coconut)
Arachidyl Glucoside
Beeswax
Cetearyl Alcohol

Hydrators: Hydrators have no oils or emollients. Its function is to rehydrate your skin and to add moisture to your skin, but no oil. Nor is it like glycerin and bring moisture to your skin. It is 'moisture'. If you are especially oily, you can probably get away with just using a hydrator, because the oils in your skin will protect it from leaving. If you have especially dry skin, adding this to your regime will help to hydrate it and help prevent flaking. Hydrators are gel like in texture and almost immediately absorb into your skin. It will usually be called "hydrator", as opposed to "moisturizer", but not all the time.

Here is a partial list of hydrators:

Cerimides
Carrageenan
Carboxymethyl Chitin
Cactus
Hyaluronic Acid

Surfactants: A shortened form of "surface-active agent", a surfactant is a chemical that stabilizes mixtures of oil and water by reducing the surface tension at the interface between the oil and water molecules. Because water and oil do not dissolve in each other, a surfactant has to be added to the mixture to keep it from separating into layers. Surfactants in cosmetics provide one or more functions. Surfactants are one of the major components of cleaning products as well as skin cleansers. Surfactants "shake up" the soil, which normally does not dissolve in water, making it dispersible and able to be removed with the wash water.

Almost all cleansing products are based on surfactants. These molecules have a special construction which soaps and syndets are all surfactants. Detergent is just a synonym for surfactant. Syndet is a word created by combining the words "synthetic" and "detergent". It was made up by the beauty industry to make products based on synthetic detergents sound sciencey and special. Synthetic detergent sounds nasty, dangerous and icky. Syndet sounds high tech, fun and friendly.

A common type of Syndet like Sodium Laurel Sulfate is made by reacting fatty alcohols with acid. Fatty Alcohol + Acid = Syndet

Soaps were the first surfactants people used for cleaning. They are made by reacting fatty acids with a base, e.g. sodium hydroxide, a process called saponification.

Fatty Acid + Base = Soap makes them compatible with both oils and water. Since oil and water do not usually mix, you need surfactants to remove oils from skin and hair. Face and body cleansers, soaps and syndets are all surfactants. There are four groups of surfactants: Anionic, Cationic, Amphoteric, And Non-Ionic.

Here is a partial list of Surfactants:

Caprylyl/Capryl Glucoside
Behenic Acid
Amaranth Protein
Behentrimonium Methosulfate
Cetearyl Glucoside
Cocamide DEA
Cocamidopropyl Betaine

Preservatives: Whether it is a cleanser, lotion, toner, blush, foundation, or mascara, without preservatives these everyday items would become overloaded with bacteria, mold, and fungus, making them harmful to skin, eyes, and mucous membranes.

Parabens may come in the form of butylparaben, ethylparaben, isobutylparaben, methylparaben, or propylparaben, and they have been linked distantly (meaning in limited studies and with only a handful of subjects or animal studies) to breast cancer due to their weak estrogenic activity and their presence in a tiny number of breast cancer tissue samples. A 'bad rap' has been given to this product ingredient based on a report published in a British Medical Journal of Toxicology a few years ago about parabens found in breast tissue of cancer victims. That cancer connection, however distant, and the media firestorm surrounding parabens, has some people worried. There is a huge debate over the safety of preservatives. Alternative preservatives started surfacing as natural product groups began a public outcry that seeks to replace parabens.

Before parabens became the subject of controversy they are today, they were the most commonly used preservative as they offer significant protection at very low percentages while at the same time being affordable. Additionally, parabens are found in foods! When parabens are added to foods they are listed as methyl-, ethyl- and propyl p-hydroxybenzoate. If you buy pre-packaged items from food stores, most often they will be preserved by parabens.

Mostly the paraben issue is overwrought and overhyped with lots of misleading information, but if you choose to avoid these ingredients a quick look at the ingredient label on any cosmetic will give you that option.

Should you avoid parabens? Quoted from Paula Begoun, (www.paulaschoice.com) "No! Despite the media frenzy surrounding parabens, the published research and global cosmetic regulatory organizations are making that answer clear: parabens, especially in the small amounts used in personal-care products, do not pose a significant health risk. There is no legitimate reason for consumers to avoid cosmetic products that contain parabens. According to these studies, parabens are "fully metabolized before they enter the blood stream." In a review of the estrogenic activity of parabens, the author concluded that based on maximum daily exposure estimates, "it was impossible that parabens could increase the risk associated with exposure to estrogenic chemicals."

Regardless of what you decide about parabens, you should know that there is no research proving parabens should be avoided when you shop for personal-care products for yourself or your family.

Here is a partial list of preservatives:

The parabens: Butyl, Methyl, Ethyl, Isobutyl, and Propylparaben
Caprylyl Glycol
Boric Acid
Benzoic Alcohol
Artemisinine Glycinelmine
Phenoxyethanol
Ethyl Hexyl Glycerin
Isodium EDTA,
BHA (Butylated hydroxyanisole)
BHT (butylated hydroxytoluene)
Imidazolidinyl urea,
Quaternium-15
DMDM hydantoin,
Phenoxyethanol,
Benzyl Alcohol, t
Etrasodium EDTA (ethylenediaminetetra-acetic acid)

Formaldehyde. Chlorphenesin

Solvents: Solvents are an important part of many beauty and cosmetic products. Many consumer products rely on solvents to dissolve ingredients and allow them to work properly. Solvents can aid in the development of lotions, creams, foundations, rouges, powders, shaving creams and other products that are designed to maintain skin elasticity and soften the skin. Solvents are used to deliver antibacterial agents or to provide an appropriate consistency for the skin care product. They also can play a role in delivering color or fragrance to some products. Some skin cleansers or toners help dissolve and remove traces of make-up while cooling the skin as the solvent evaporates. From facial lotions to shaving gel, solvents play an important role in helping skin care products perform.

A partial list of solvents in skin care:

Butyl alcohol	Alcohol
Butylene Glycol	Glycerin
Denatured Alcohol	Propylene Glycol

In addition to all these ingredients and processes, other ingredients added to your skin and body care products can do the following:

Adjust pH
Add color
Create foam
Add fragrance
Add moisture
Add sun protection
Add healing benefits
Boost collagen
Exfoliate
Reduce Oil Gland activity