



Living Gluten-Free by **Tricia Thompson, MS, RD** The Gluten-Free Dietitian

Gluten In Personal Care Products: A Need To Worry?

The bottom line: There is no scientific evidence that the use of gluten-containing products that are not ingested is harmful to persons with celiac disease. This includes individuals with dermatitis herpetiformis.

According to Dr. Alessio Fasano, Medical Director of the Center for Celiac Research, University of Maryland, "If you have celiac disease, then the application of gluten containing products to the skin should not be a problem, unless you have skin lesions that allow gluten to be absorbed systemically in great quantities.

"The reason why this should not be a problem is that, based on what we know right now, it is the oral ingestion of gluten that activates the immunological cascades leading to the autoimmune process typical of celiac disease."

There aren't too many individuals on the planet who know more about celiac disease than Dr. Fasano, so please, do not let anyone, including medical professionals convince you that gluten protein can be absorbed through the skin and cause a celiac disease reaction. It simply isn't true.

If you still need more convincing, check out what Cynthia Kupper RD, Executive Director of The Gluten Intolerance Group, has to say.

"While investigating the possible absorption of gluten through the skin, I have talked with many regulatory organizations and research and development people in the cosmetic industry. They all agree that gluten and all proteins are too large to be absorbed through the skin. Therefore, topical care products that contain gluten do not need to be avoided by persons with CD and DH.

"It is also important to understand that it is possible to have celiac disease and other sensitivities. When it comes to products labeled hypoallergenic, this simply means that the product is 'less likely to cause an allergic reaction.' So if you have a skin reaction to a product, you may have a sensitivity that you think might be related to gluten, but is actually related to something else in the product."

As Cynthia suggests, you may have a skin reaction to any number of ingredients in any number of products for reasons other than celiac disease (such as an allergy). If this is the case, you should stop using the product and speak with your dermatologist.

So using common sense, what personal care products might you ingest?

Products that you use in your mouth, such as toothpaste and mouthwash and products that you apply to your lips, such as lipstick could be ingested.

You really don't need to worry about products you apply to your skin, such as body lotion, sunscreen, shaving cream, deodorant, makeup, and perfume.

You also do not need to worry about products you apply to your hair, such as shampoo and conditioner.

Hand lotion is one of those in-between cases. If you use a lot of it and often and don't always wash your hands before eating (yuck!) then you could ingest some hand lotion. Or if you always apply hand lotion after washing your hands, including before eating then you could ingest some hand lotion.

So using common sense how much toothpaste, mouthwash and lipstick might you ingest?

When it comes to toothpaste and mouthwash, if you spit out the toothpaste and mouthwash and then thoroughly rinse your mouth with water, you probably won't consume much product. When it comes to lipstick, supposedly each woman "eats" 6 pounds of lipstick during her lifetime. (I have no idea where this information originally came from but it doesn't seem accurate. Each of my lipsticks weights 0.13 ounces so supposedly I will eat about 738 of the lipsticks I use!)

I really have no idea how much gluten a lipstick might contain—to my knowledge lipsticks have never been tested. If for the sake of argument though, I assume that I eat 3 lipsticks a year (which seems reasonable only if I actually manage to ingest all the lipstick I put on my lips) then I eat 0.39 ounces or 11.4 grams (11,400 milligrams) of lipstick each year. If the lipstick I use is comprised of 1% gluten protein, my daily intake of gluten from lipstick is 0.31 milligrams. If the lipstick I use is comprised of 5% gluten protein, my daily intake of gluten from lipstick is 1.56 milligrams.

To put these numbers into perspective, based on studies conducted on the daily tolerance level of gluten for persons with celiac disease, 10 milligrams of gluten is considered safe.

Tricia Thompson, M.S., RD is a nutrition consultant, author and speaker specializing in celiac disease and the gluten-free diet. She is the author of The Gluten-Free Nutrition Guide (McGraw-Hill) and co-author of The Complete Idiot's Guide to Gluten-Free Eating (Penguin Group). For more information, visit www.glutenfreedietitian.com.

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