

Taste For Life
Beauty feature

The Cruelty-Free Commitment

By Karolyn A. Gazella

The non-profit organization RDS: Understanding Animal Research in Medicine has estimated that about 50 million animals are used in research worldwide. According to RDS, the United States performs about 15 million procedures each year. [1] Some organizations feel the number is even higher claiming that as many as 100 million animals are used in research each year. [2] Proponents of this type of research argue that animals have played a significant role in advancing medicine. Without animal research we may not have discovered penicillin, various vaccines, or been able to perfect organ transplants. [2,3] Few will discount the importance of these and other medical advancements, however, opponents of animal research argue that there are many instances when animal testing is unnecessary cruelty.

The fact is, the FDA via the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act does not require the use of animal testing of cosmetic and body care ingredients. [4] “Yet, thousands of innocent animals are maimed and killed every year in the name of beauty,” explains Sally Malanga, President and Founder of Ecco Bella natural cosmetics and body care products.

While most people understand and appreciate the medical breakthroughs made as a result of reasonable and necessary animal testing, animal welfare advocates question the necessity of animal testing in the beauty, body care, and household products industries.

“There is no need for animal testing on our products because we begin with high-quality, non-toxic ingredients,” explains Myra Eby, President and Founder of MyChelle Dermaceuticals makers of cruelty-free, non-toxic body care products.

What is cruelty-free?

Animal testing refers to an intervention or treatment that can cause the animal pain, fear, and/or suffering and does not provide any benefit to the animal. Some in the scientific community have taken the lead in the area of animal welfare as it relates to research. More than 40 years ago, UK researchers Russell and Burch developed the 3 Rs: when possible, Replace animals with alternatives, Reduce the number of animals used, and Refine experiments to include less pain and distress.[5]

“...the most humane science is the best science,” according to Dr. Goldberg from Johns Hopkins University. “...pain and distress must be eliminated in animal experiments or reduced to an absolute minimum, and, as scientists, we must use the most humane approaches in our research.”[6]

As some of those in the scientific community rally around compassionate treatment of research animals, some product manufacturers are equally concerned. When it comes to beauty and body care, conscientious companies are embracing the cruelty-free motto. Although there is no formal system enforcing the cruelty-free program, manufacturers who use the cruelty-free label commit to using ingredients that were not

tested on animals.

“We choose to be cruelty-free because it’s the right thing to do,” explains Eby. “There is just no need to make animals suffer if the ingredients are non-toxic in the first place. Besides, we have willing and able humans that test our products.” Eby says her customers appreciate the cruelty-free logo and her company’s strong stance on eliminating animal abuse. “We can all do our part to end unnecessary animal cruelty.”

According to the Humane Society of the United States, if more manufacturers of cosmetic, body care, and household products would swear off animal testing, millions of animals would be spared pain and suffering.

“All living beings are connected,” explains Malanga. “To injure one is to injure all.” Malanga says that choosing cruelty-free is a significant part of her company’s values. “We were cruelty-free from the very beginning.”

Why is it important?

Even if a consumer of body care and beauty products can set aside the debate about animal compassion, they cannot avoid the obvious: If there is a question that an ingredient may be unsafe for consumers, why use it? According to both Eby and Malanga, safe, natural, non-toxic ingredients can be used in body care and beauty products. “Animal testing in the beauty and body care industries should be a moot point,” says Eby.

Unfortunately, safe, non-toxic ingredients are not the norm. According to a coalition of non-profit organizations called the Environmental Working Group, every day the average adult uses nine personal care products containing 126 potentially dangerous chemicals.[7] “The first step to reducing animal testing is to have consumers read labels carefully and not purchase products that contain toxic ingredients,” emphasized Eby. “The skin is the largest organ of the body. It’s one of the most sophisticated sponges ever created. The last thing we should do is put potentially toxic ingredients on our skin.”

According to Karen Lee Stevens, Founder and President of All For Animals, if manufacturers are concerned about safety of their ingredients, there are plenty of alternatives to animal testing. Some of the more common alternatives include cell cultures (also known as in-vitro tests), human volunteers, and database searches of other studies to avoid duplication.[8] According to the Human Society, alternatives to animal testing can be even more accurate and easier to reproduce.[9] A BBC online report also claims the stress the animals endure in the labs not only negatively influences the research outcomes, it can make the results of the experiments meaningless.[3]

The cruelty-free commitment

Because of the sheer number of beauty and body care products that are used and the limited number of manufacturers who have a cruelty-free commitment, it may be difficult to be completely cruelty-free. However, the positive impact that consumers can have on this issue is amazing. According to RDS, a renewed commitment to the 3 Rs led to a significant reduction in animal testing in the United Kingdom. [1]

Choosing cruelty-free beauty and body care products ensures that you are protecting innocent animals. But it can also reinforce your desire to use non-toxic products in the first place.

For a list of companies that are cruelty-free visit www.caringconsumer.org and

click on “support cruelty-free companies.” [10]

References:

1. http://www.rds-online.org.uk/page.asp?i_ToolbarID=2&i_PageID=31
2. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Animal_testing
3. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/print/science/hottopics/animalexperiments/print.shtml>
4. <http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/>
5. Rusche B: The 3Rs and animal welfare—conflict or the way forward? ALTEX 20(Suppl 1):63-76, 2003. (pub med #14671703)
6. Goldberg AM: Animals and alternatives: societal expectations and scientific need. Altern Lab Anim 32(6):545-51 Dec 2004. (pub med #15757493)
7. <http://www.ewg.org/reports/skindeep2/findings>
8. <http://www.allforanimals.com/alternatives1.htm>
9. http://www.hsus.org/animals_in_research/animal_testing/
10. <http://caringconsumer.com>