

# 'CLEAN' BEAUTY

It's the buzz phrase in cosmetics and skincare, driven by a demand to know more about what we're putting on our skin. But what does 'clean' actually mean, and is it really better for us?

BY CECILY-ANNA BENNETT

There's a growing awareness about the chemicals we are putting on our skin in the name of beauty, and as a result, cosmetic brands are being encouraged to 'clean' up their acts and introduce more natural, less chemical, formulations.

Meanwhile, a groundswell of brands are emerging that tout their 'clean' credentials. Australian skincare brand Sukin has a 'Synthetic Swap' promotion that urges us to switch a synthetic-based product in our make-up bag for a Sukin one, free of charge. At the same time, the make-up label Bare Minerals' 'Power of Good' campaign emphasises the benefits of eschewing parabens for purity and natural over fake. Even big chains like Sephora are getting in on the act with their 'Clean at Sephora' initiative, which last year aimed to make shopping for clean products easier.

"We know over 60 per cent of women who buy beauty read the label before they do, and over 54 per cent want to know if it's natural or clean and what ingredients are in there," Sephora's chief merchandising officer in the US, Artemis Patrick, said. "It's not about whether it's good or it's bad, it's about being transparent."

Of course, transparency is always a good thing – but when it comes down to it, what does clean really mean? Does it mean shunning products containing certain ingredients, or choosing vegan? Should you be more switched-on to sustainable practices in both product and packaging, keeping your complexion as clear as your conscience?

Turns out it's all that, sometimes less, sometimes more. For what seems to be a simple word, it's actually rather complicated.

## 'CLEAN' MEANS...

Just as your idea of a clean house (throwing clothes in cupboards, sweeping dust under the couch) might not be the same as your mum's (everything perfectly folded, vacuuming skills unrivalled), the term 'clean beauty' can be subjective.

"Everyone has a different take on the term and there is no governing body that classifies it," says Tracey Bailey, who founded one of Australia's leading ecostores, Biome, in 2003. "Some brands only consider the ingredients when assessing whether a product is clean or not, others look at additional factors like whether it's cruelty-free or ethically and sustainably made. We take a holistic approach when assessing each product at Biome as we believe clean beauty should be 'clean' from beginning to end."

For Dr Adam Sheridan from Specialist Dermatology Surgery and Laser in Melbourne, it's rather more straightforward, but still relies on a certain level of consumer savvy. "In dermatology we primarily use this term for products that are free of unhelpful ingredients with the potential to cause harm rather than deliver a benefit," he explains. "At a deeper level, dermatologists (and hopefully consumers) consider

In dermatology we primarily use this term for products that are free of unhelpful ingredients with the potential to cause harm.



Bare Minerals Mineral Veil Finishing Powder SPF 25, \$23



Mukti  
Vitamin Booster  
Vital B Elixir, \$104.95

the wider impact of a product upon society and the environment, including those tested upon animals in a cruel, unregulated fashion, those produced in countries with minimal or no labour rights, those contained in excessive non-recyclable packaging, or products that contain non-biodegradable microbeads.”

## DOES CLEAN MEAN NO TOXINS?

The answer to this is clearly yes. Essentially, clean beauty means products that don’t contain controversial or harmful ingredients, ensuring your skincare and cosmetics are less likely to irritate your skin or pose potential health risks. So, what should you be looking out for?

“Artificial colours, fragrances, foaming agents and plastic microbeads are to be avoided. Other synthetic chemicals to minimise exposure to, where possible, include parabens, phthalates,

chemically-produced beauty product contains between 15 to 50 ingredients. Women use around nine to 15 beauty products daily, applying approximately 515 harmful chemicals to their skin through the use of cosmetics, beauty products and perfumes,” she explains.

“The industry selects from a palette of some 12,500 chemicals in the production of beauty products. Most cosmetics contain a concoction of ingredients including water, fragrances, emulsifiers, emollients, colouring agents, preservatives, thickening agents, and pH stabilisers.”

It makes sense that avoiding many of these is better for not only our skin, but also the environment; every time we wash ourselves, these products are going down the drain and into our waterways.



Nude By  
Nature  
Liquid  
Mineral  
Foundation,  
\$39.95

## IS CLEAN ALL-NATURAL?

It’s complicated. “We shouldn’t be looking at beauty from the binary perspective of manmade versus synthetic, but rather that there are good, safe, effective ingredients, and there are bad, harmful and unsafe ingredients,” argues Mukti. “In [my products] I use ingredients that have been created in a laboratory like vitamins and peptides but these are recognised and assimilated [by the skin]. Not everything synthetic needs to be demonised. As we age our skin requires extra nutrients that our body is no longer producing as effectively. Fortifying skincare with plant-based essential fatty acids, antioxidants and vitamins is literally skin food.”

Sheridan goes a step further, saying, “Many synthetic products beat so-called natural products. For example, antibiotics and antiseptics are generally manufactured to deliver quality control and have increased the quality of life for most of humanity. Don’t be fooled by simple marketing and take the time to do your own research,” he urges.

So here’s the rub: ‘natural’ isn’t always gentler and ‘synthetic’ isn’t always harmful. Brands such as Ren Clean Skincare and Drunk Elephant shun controversial ingredients, but often combine some synthetics with natural ones for optimum efficacy,

sodium lauryl sulfate, lanolin/wool fats and high concentrations of alcohol and formaldehyde,” Sheridan explains. “The form and concentration of an ingredient is often just as significant as the ingredient itself. Most Australian-made products adhere to strict standards, but always check the label and be bold; contact the company directly if you have any concerns.”

Mukti, founder of Australian beauty brand Mukti Organics is so passionate about clean skincare, that her new book, *Truth in Beauty* devotes 300 pages to breaking down the benefits of natural and organic cosmetics. “Just because a product is for sale doesn’t mean that it is safe,” she says. “So many more people are having allergies, sensitivities, hormonal issues and the increase of terminal diseases is on the rise. Choosing clean products is about arming yourself with facts and making decisions that support health and wellness.”

Meanwhile, sobering statistics from Bailey may inspire you to make more ‘natural’ choices: “The average



Sukin Lime  
& Coconut  
Hydrating  
Body Lotion,  
\$20.95; Aesop  
Mandarin  
Facial Hydrating  
Cream, \$53

believing that whether natural or synthetic, the priority is boosting the health of your skin.

Still, the word ‘natural’ is not subject to regulation. Skincare brands may promote ingredients that claim to solve common problems, but the amount of the key ingredient may be minimal.

“When you look at the list on these products, you will often find the key ingredient is at the very bottom of the list and the ingredients that make up the majority of the product are fillers like water, petrochemicals (mineral oil), fragrance, thickeners and preservatives that decrease the potency and effectiveness of the product,” warns Bailey.

## IS CLEAN CRUELTY-FREE?

It can be, but doesn’t have to be. Vegans may want to avoid all animal-derived ingredients such as honey, beeswax, collagen, lanolin and gelatin. These are generally safe to use (though lanolin can be an irritant), so choosing this path is one taken with animal welfare in mind. The good news is vegan products, such as those from Aesop and Harper + Arlo, are becoming more mainstream.

If protecting furry critters is on your agenda, it’s worth avoiding the natural ingredient palm oil. “Around 300 football fields of rainforest are felled per day for palm oil plantations, killing around 6,000 orangutans every year,” says Bailey. “And inadequate labelling regulations allow brands to hide palm oil behind more than 200 alternate names such as glycerine and plant surfactant.” It’s worth knowing that brands such as Aesop, Nude by Nature and Antipodes are entirely cruelty free.

Animal welfare aside, it’s the environment (and the wellbeing of people involved in the production line) that, while not essential by definition, goes hand-in-hand with the clean philosophy. In short? Read labels closely and always treat your skin with the same consideration you lend to the rest of your lifestyle: be aware, take care, be kind. **P**



# 5 CLEAN beauty buys

### Raww

This organic skincare and make-up brand focuses on Australian-made natural ingredients that are certified cruelty-free and many products are also certified vegan. It’s free of toxins synthetics, chemicals and chock-full of goodness. [rawwc cosmetics.com](http://rawwc cosmetics.com)

### A’kin

Bursting with botanicals, vegan and free from sulfates, ethoxylated cleansers, parabens, propylene glycol, silicones, phthalates, mineral oils and artificial colours (to name a few), this is a brand that epitomises kindness to your skin. [akin.com.au](http://akin.com.au)

### Ethique

These New Zealand-made beauty bars for hair, face and body are as clean as you’ll ever feel post-shower. It’s a zero-waste, vegan, cruelty-free, super-concentrated, sustainable revolution, which has saved more than 500,000 plastic bottles ending up in landfill since launching in 2012. [ethiquebeauty.co.nz](http://ethiquebeauty.co.nz)

### Drunk Elephant

While this clean-brand-of-the-moment (with its 385k Instagram followers) contains both natural and non-toxic ‘biocompatible’ synthetic ingredients, its clean status is largely down to its elimination of what founder Tiffany Masterson calls the ‘Suspicious 6’: ingredients that are said to cause skin irritation and harm, such as fragrances, dyes, silicone (which can block absorption of active ingredients) and alcohol. [drunkelephant.com](http://drunkelephant.com)

### Inika Organic

Born from a need for a chemical-detox, this ethically sourced, natural and vegan brand of skincare and cosmetics is good for your skin and for the planet. [inikaorganic.com](http://inikaorganic.com)

Women use around nine to 15 beauty products daily, applying approximately 515 harmful chemicals to their skin.



Ren Clean Skincare  
Glycol Lactic Radiance  
Renewal Mask, \$71;  
Harper + Arlo  
Quince Seed & Olive  
Squalane Moisture  
Shampoo, \$27.95.

