

Bad beauty deals

Lots of products out there can be a waste of money, or worse

Frizzy hair, skinny lips, skimpy lashes, flabby necks, lumpy thighs. For every beauty dilemma, there's a product that's claimed to solve it. But many don't, and lots of us have been suckered into buying stuff that doesn't work.

Having a strong desire to fix a beauty problem can make us more gullible, even if they're obviously bogus, according to Laura Triplett, a socio-behavioral researcher at California State University at Fullerton. She studied the effectiveness of pictures used in weight-loss ads. "Even when the overweight person in the before photo was obviously not the same slim person pictured in the after photo, people who are eager to lose weight reported a much higher likelihood that they would purchase that product," she said.

The truth is that only Food and Drug Administration-approved products—things considered drugs—are proven to work. But the majority of beauty products aren't FDA-approved. So don't bank on dramatic results. And be aware that the safety of cosmetics and so-called cosmeceuticals can also be an issue. "Most consumers mistakenly believe that cosmeceuticals are regulated and tested as drugs, that the ingredients and final products have been tested for safety, that the claims made in ads are valid," says Amy E. Newburger, M.D., a dermatologist at St. Luke's-Roosevelt Hospital Center in New York.

Baldness and cellulite cures are notorious for suckering consumers. Below is a sampling of other beauty products associated with fishy claims or safety questions.

LASH GROWERS

"Lash-growth products are regulated as drugs by the FDA and must be subject to approval," says John E. Bailey, chief scientist at the Personal Care Products Council, a trade association. One that is approved is Latisse (which we don't recommend because of risks, including potential darkening of eye color and eyelids, not to mention the price—up to \$120 per month). But you'll see plenty of other "lash lengtheners." Some have been issued warning letters by the FDA because they contain drugs. Other lash-product manufacturers advertise ingredients such as peptides and vitamins, as does Fusion Beauty with its StimuLashFusion, \$89. The maker claims that 89 percent of users reported that their lashes appear longer in as little as six weeks. Peter Thomas Roth advertises that its Lashes To Die For, \$125, makes lashes appear 64 percent longer within four to eight weeks of use. But here's the real deal: "No cosmetic can make lashes grow longer, or it would be classified as a drug," says Perry Romanowski, an independent cosmetic chemist. "If a cosmetic makes your lashes grow, it probably contains a misbranded drug and could have unknown side effects." **ShopSmart says** Stick with mascara. Lancôme Définitionel, \$24, was top-rated in our last test.

HAIR SMOOTHERS

Ads for Brazilian Keratin Treatment (BKT), a popular salon technique, claim that it leaves hair smooth and healthy-looking for months. A chief ingredient in the product is formaldehyde, says Romanowski,

which is not banned in hair straighteners by the FDA, but it's a probable carcinogen that can also cause eye, nose, and throat irritation; wheezing and coughing; skin rash; and other reactions. "Some salons claim to do formaldehyde-free BKT. But if it does work as well, it probably features an aldehyde, which is like formaldehyde and is not safer," Romanowski says.

ShopSmart says Try a straightening iron. We like the Revlon Perfect Heat Ceramic RVST2001C, \$30.

LIP PLUMPERS

When we tested lip plumpers, the results were unimpressive for increasing lip volume, though some, including products from Clinique and DuWop, temporarily smoothed lip lines a little.

ShopSmart says Try makeup tricks instead. Line your lips with pencil just outside your natural lip line, then dot highlighter just above the upper lip and just below the lower lip. If you want a more permanent pout, see a doctor. Cosmetic surgeons we talked to recommended temporary injectable hyaluronic fillers such as Juvéderm and Restylane. If you don't like the results, they'll be gone within a year.

SCAR ELIMINATORS

"You can't turn a scar back into normal skin," says Charles E. Crutchfield III, M.D., clinical adjunct associate professor of dermatology at the University of Minnesota Medical School. "Some things will help, but to varying degrees, and anyone who tells you that their product will completely eliminate stretch marks or other scars is telling an untruth."

ShopSmart says See a dermatologist. Certain laser treatments can sometimes reduce redness and smooth skin so that scars are not as apparent,

Crutchfield says. "Topical products my patients find helpful to improve the appearance of stretch marks and scars include prescription tretinoin-containing products (such as Renova) and Lac-Hydrin." Over-the-counter products he recommends: AmLactin, Kelo-cote, Mederma, and Dermatrix.

BUST BOOSTERS

"No ingredient has ever been scientifically proven to enlarge, lift,

or firm the bust," Romanowski says. "Puffery in ads and on packaging gives false hope, and plenty of women buy into the hype." **ShopSmart says** Use a moisturizer or bust cream if your décolletage needs softening. Or try a push-up bra or bra inserts, aka "chicken cutlets."

UNDER-EYE-CIRCLE ERASERS

Many products promise to erase under-eye circles, but they're hard to treat. Some people have enlarged veins and very thin skin under their eyes, says Dr. Joseph A. Eviatar, assistant clinical professor of ophthalmology at New York Medical College.

ShopSmart says Some eye creams with caffeine can offer temporary help for puffiness under the eyes. If the problem is allergy-related, you can try antihistamines or topical hydrocortisone cream. Or see your dermatologist. "Overall, cosmetic surgery is the most effective option," says New York dermatologist Deborah Sarnoff, M.D., senior vice president of The Skin Cancer Foundation. She favors CO₂ fractional laser resurfacing or injectable fillers such as Juvéderm or Restylane. But if the problem is hyperpigmentation, your doc might also suggest using a prescription-strength hydroquinone cream.

DOUBLE-CHIN SLIMMER

A \$20 infomercial gadget called the Neckline Slimmer promises to eliminate a double chin with resistance exercise. But a plastic surgeon we consulted says that the device mainly exercises neck-flexor muscles that have nothing to do with a heavy neck or a double chin, usually due to loose skin and/or excess fat, which are not correctable with exercise.

ShopSmart says Try losing some weight or see a cosmetic surgeon. A scarf might also do the trick.

Other money wasters

A few more products not worth buying

■ **PRICEY CLEANSERS** They're in contact with your skin for just seconds, so they're not worth spending lots of money on. "Active ingredients such as hydroxy acids, peptides, and vitamins are more useful in facial moisturizers and eye creams because they remain on your skin much longer than a cleanser," Sarnoff says.

■ **BRUSH-ON SUNSCREENS** Titanium dioxide and zinc oxide work as sunscreen and can be found in many brands of mineral makeup. People might not get enough coverage with regular sunscreen because they don't apply enough, and loose powder could be even trickier. It could also be brushed off the skin.

■ **TONERS** They tend to strip away natural oils, which can leave your skin dry and/or irritated, especially if the product contains alcohol.



LEFT HOLDING THE BAG
Don't be duped by big beauty claims.

WENDELL WEBBER; PROP STYLING: MARTHA BERNABE