Patients spend more than $18 billion a year on the beauty industry in the United States. Blepharoplasty was the fourth most common cosmetic surgery in 2018, and the number one and number two nonsurgical procedures were injections of neurotoxins and fillers, respectively.

Optometrists have an incredible opportunity to talk with patients about avoiding cosmetic offenders and bad habits and explain the benefits of injections and nonsurgical and surgical procedures. We absolutely have the skill set not only to be a part of these conversations, but to lead them.

As with any good conversation, it starts with asking the right questions.

**EDUCATE YOUR PATIENTS**

But how do we have this kind of conversation without making it awkward or insulting? An easy entry point is to discuss your findings throughout your examination. As you assess the periorcular skin, talk to your patient about how common skin cancer is in your region.

Only 1% of the human body’s skin is in the periorcular area, yet 5% to 10% of skin cancer is located there. Why is that?

One study examined that question. In the study, patients were asked to apply sunscreen as they normally would, and UV pictures were acquired to document their application habits. What was missing on every patient? The periorcular region. Teach patients about properly applying sunscreen and wearing sunglasses that block UV-A and UV-B light.

As you check patients for dermatomalagi, droopy lids, or lash touch, ask them if their eyelids have been bothering them recently. That conversation can lead to a recommendation for radiofrequency (RF) treatments or blepharoplasty.

As you continue through the slit-lamp exam and evaluate the lids and lashes, take the opportunity to discuss healthy habits. Notice if patients are wearing eyelash extensions, and, if so, ask how they clean them. “I’m curious how you take care of these; can you walk me through how you do it?” If they have long eyelashes, ask if they are natural (lucky them!) or if they use a lash enhancement serum such as the FDA-approved bimatoprost ophthalmic solution 0.03% (Latisse, Allergan). Make sure patients who use a serum are applying it appropriately,
Watch out for these harmful ingredients commonly found in cosmetics.

**Aminophenol, diaminobenzene, phenylenediamine-coal tar:** Carcinogens found in hair dye and shampoo.

**Benzalkonium chloride:** Preservative associated with severe skin, eye, and respiratory irritation and allergies. Found in sunscreens and moisturizers.

**BHA and BHT:** Carcinogens found in exfoliants and perfumes.

**Dibutyl phthalate, toluene, formaldehyde (The Toxic Trio):** Chemicals found in nail polish and other nail products; can cause birth defects, endocrine disruption, headaches, and respiratory problems.

**Ethylene diaminetetraacetic acid:** Chelating (binding) agent added to cosmetics to improve stability. May be toxic to organs. Found in hair dyes and moisturizers.

**Hydroquinone:** Skin-lightening agent; can cause ochronosis.

**Isopropyl cloprostenate:** Synthetic prostaglandin found in over-the-counter eyelash growth serums.

**Oxybenzone:** Organic compound found in sunscreen; mimics estrogen.

**Parabens:** Preservative that mimics estrogen; linked to breast and skin cancers and decreased sperm count.

**Petroleum distillates:** A mix of volatile hydrocarbons obtained from petroleum; can cause mascara-contact dermatitis; can contain cancer-causing impurities. Avoid waterproof mascara.

**Polyethylene glycol:** Carcinogen found in scrubs, creams, and shampoos.

**Propylene glycol:** Skin-conditioning agent; can cause dermatitis and hives.

**Retinyl palmitate, retinyl acetate, retinoic acid, retinol:** Forms of vitamin A; found in moisturizers and lip and antiaging products; carcinogenic in sunlight.

**Sodium lauryl sulfate:** Detergent and surfactant found in shampoo, body wash, face wash, mouthwash, and toothpaste.

**Synthetic fragrance or flavor:** Additives that are among the top five allergy-causing agents.

**Triclosan and triclocarban:** Antibacterials found in toothpaste, deodorant, and antibacterial soap; can cause hormonal disruption and bacterial resistance.

and discuss the possible side effects.

What about patients who have junk in their tear film, have so much mascara caked on that it’s clogging the meibomian glands, or use their eyeliner inside the waterline? If you notice this, speak up; otherwise, your patients might not realize they’re harming their eyes.

Advising patients to stop wearing makeup will likely have no effect. For a more fruitful conversation, discuss the importance of removing eye makeup every night and explain how products containing tea tree oil or hypochlorous acid can be beneficial for hygiene. Tell patients to apply eyeliner on the dry side of the lid, not on the inside of the waterline where the delicate meibomian glands can be harmed.

**WHAT TO AVOID**

Typically in these types of discussions, patients will ask what ingredients or products to use; if they don’t, then forge ahead with more questions. I say to patients, “Many patients have found this information about what ingredients in cosmetics to avoid useful; is that something you would like to discuss further?”

You don’t have to be an expert on brands; instead, teach your patients the ingredients to avoid (see Cosmetic Offenders). The FDA hasn’t changed the Cosmetic Act since 1938. Proposed legislation was recently introduced to modernize the laws; however, the beauty industry reacted, and it was not signed into law. So consumer protections aren’t there, and our patients are on their own.

Store shelves are filled with products labeled with meaningless hype. Some of the most expensive brands on the market contain bad cosmetic offenders. Our patients are unknowingly mixing a toxic soup, and their ocular surface is suffering as a result. Have information readily at hand for them. Good resources include the Dry Eye Divas.
Many patients sabotage their ocular health with their choice of cosmetics by applying sunscreen incorrectly and not removing makeup daily.

Optometrists should educate patients on healthy cosmetic habits and what ingredients to avoid in beauty products.

Optometric procedures such as IPL and RF treatment can help patients who seek rejuvenation and “prejuvenation.”

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