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# Don't Be Rash

**Drop the soap! You may be allergic to your grooming products.**

**A**T THE BIG, annual American Academy of Dermatology meeting in San Francisco a few months ago, Dr. Anthony Fransway shared a finding that had his esteemed pimple colleagues nearly popping out of their chairs. After reviewing the literature and recent data from a dozen large dermatology practices, the Fort Myers, Florida, physician concluded that 10 percent of the American populace has suffered at least one allergy or some other bad reaction due to their grooming products. That equates to 27 million people itching, chafing, swelling, breaking out, and getting all weepy, just because of the stuff they use to look and smell better. Many, says Fransway, don't even realize it.

"They'll come in with another complaint, and their doctor will notice a redness around their eyes or a rash on their neck; until then the patient might just chalk it up to acne or lack of sleep," Fransway says. "And it's not strictly a women's problem just because they use more of these products. Men get it from colognes, shave creams, soaps, deodorants."

Other top culprits are contact solutions, moisturizers, sunscreens, and shampoos. (Don't be lulled into a false sense of security by products marked "hypoallergenic" or "unscented" — sometimes they're little more than marketing gimmicks.) If you suspect you may be one of the legion of fresh-smelling but irritated, first you'll need to isolate the offending toiletry. The idea is to stop using everything except a nonsoap cleanser and water, then add things back, one per week, until the reaction recurs. Once you think you've identified the real villain, try switching over to one of the alternatives below.

If your condition persists, you may need a patch test to determine your susceptibility to 50 or more common allergens. After checking the ingredients of your medicine cabinet to help slightly narrow the field, your doctor will adhere two large plastic strips' worth of allergy screens on your back; 48 to 72 hours later, a positive match will be indicated by a red, itchy rash. It's an unpleasant form of diagnosis, to be sure, but nowhere near as unpleasant as reirritating yourself every time you try to get clean.

—Lydia Strohl

## SCRATCH AND SWITCH

IF THIS MAKES YOU ITCH OR BREAK OUT	THE LIKELY CULPRIT IS	TRY THIS BRAND INSTEAD
■ <b>SHAVING CREAM</b>	Fragrances such as oak moss or eugenol	Aveeno Therapeutic Shave Gel; Clinique Cream Shave
■ <b>DEODORANT</b>	Fragrances or formaldehyde donors	Almay antiperspirants; Arm & Hammer Unscented
■ <b>MOISTURIZER OR SUNSCREEN</b>	Fragrances, formaldehyde donors, parabens, or lanolin	Vanicream or Elta moisturizers and sunscreens
■ <b>DEODORANT SOAP</b>	Fragrances, formaldehyde donors, or isothiazolinones	Cetaphil, Basis, or Vanicream skin cleansers
■ <b>SHAMPOO OR CONDITIONER</b>	Fragrances, formaldehyde donors, or isothiazolinones	Free & Clear Shampoo and Conditioner
■ <b>CONTACT SOLUTION</b>	Thimerosal or other preservatives	Sensitive Eyes saline spray; ReNu preservative-free drops