Do Antiperspirants Cause Cancer? Experts Say No

"Natural" and "aluminum-free" deodorants may be trendy, but antiperspirants are not bad for you.

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Sales of "natural" and "aluminum-free" deodorants are on the rise, fueled in part by fears that antiperspirants are linked to cancer. A recent article in Slate debunks the myth.

The article is the latest in a series in which writer Shannon Palus tests health and wellness products. Palus traces myths around antiperspirant and cancer back to online message boards, blogs and emails that have been circulating for decades.

Much of the online chatter links antiperspirant to cancer, Alzheimer's, kidney disease and other illnesses. Most cite the active ingredient aluminum as the health-destroying culprit.

Catering to those fears, Palus reports, are a growing number of personal care start-ups selling "aluminum-free" or "natural" deodorants to health-concerned customers. Palus sampled some of these products and determined they were fine but not because they were saving her from any harm.

For the record, because deodorants only mask odor, unlike antiperspirants, which prevent sweating, they never contain the pore-clogging chemical aluminum, so "aluminum-free" deodorant is redundant.

Much of the research supporting claims that antiperspirant is dangerous has been dubious, Palus point out. She cites one study in particular, conducted in 1965, for which researchers injected aluminum salts into rabbits. The animals eventually developed "neurofibrillary tangles" that the researchers claimed were similar to those found in the brains of people with Alzheimer's—later work disproved this theory.

A study from 2004 similarly suggested that when applied directly to kidney cells in a petri dish, antiperspirant could damage DNA. As critics soon quickly pointed out, the study's methods—tantamount to dumping chemicals on raw internal organ tissue—did not reveal anything about the effect of the application of tiny amounts of aluminum to the skin.

The good news is, organizations such as the National Cancer Institute and the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute as well as publications like Business Insider and Teen Vogue routinely share study results debunking these antiperspirant myths. Researchers on one often-cited study interviewed over 1,600 women (half of whom had been diagnosed with breast cancer) and found no link between antiperspirants and the disease.

To learn about other common cancer myths, click here.

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