

Separate All-Natural from All-Hype

by Brandi Schlossberg

Whether you're shopping for laundry detergent or strawberry preserves, if the label says "natural," you may be more inclined to pick that product. The word natural seems to imply a commodity is free of synthetic ingredients.

Unfortunately, it's not that simple. Finding truly natural products goes beyond locating this word on a label, for the term natural has no official definition, and use of the word isn't regulated, except in the case of meat and poultry.

According to Consumers Union, the independent, nonprofit testing center that publishes *Consumer Reports*, product labels using "natural" or "all-natural" are essentially meaningless.

The Consumers Union Web site states, "No standard definition for these terms exists. The producer or manufacturer decides whether to use this claim and is not free from its own self-interest."

It's up to the consumer to determine if a product is truly natural, and this takes education. For massage therapists, selecting a natural massage lubricant may be of



particular importance, since lubricants touch you and your clients on a regular basis.

Defining natural

Organizations, such as the Natural Ingredient Resource Center (NIRC), are helping consumers grasp the definition of natural and offer standards for manufacturers who wish to produce natural goods.

The NIRC's Web site notes, "Natural ingredients include plant, animal, mineral or microbial ingredients present in or produced by nature; processed using minimal physical process-

ing; directly extracted using simple methods, simple chemical reactions or resulting from naturally occurring biological processes."

It's easy to grasp that for a product to be defined as natural its ingredients must come from nature. The confusion often arises in understanding the methods used to process these ingredients into consumer-ready products.

"Minimal processing means the ingredient has had no more processing than something that could be made

in your skin health and overall wellness. ing system, known as International Nomenclature Cosmetic Ingredients (INCI), for ingredient labeling of all cosmetic products. For instance, Tocopherol Acetate is the INCI name for vitamin E, and Retinyl Palmitate is the INCI name for vitamin A. While they may sound synthetic, both ingredients are all-natural and known to play an important role

in a household kitchen, stillroom, on a farm or vineyard," reports NIRC. "It doesn't mean [the products] have to actually be made in those settings, but that they would require no more equipment or technology than that which could be employed in those settings."

The organization gives several examples of extraction methods and simple chemical reactions that constitute "minimal processing," including cleaning, cold pressing, dehydration, desiccation, drying, evaporation, filtering, grinding, infusing with water or natural alcohol, and steam or water distilling.

Natural massage lubricants

Armed with insight into the definition of natural, therapists should look beyond this word on a label. If you wish to work with a lubricant that meets the NIRC standards for "natural," begin by reading the ingredients.

If the ingredients are packed with chemical preservatives, artificial colors or other synthetic ingredients, there's a good chance the product isn't natural.

Mother Nature offers a treasure trove of fruits, herbs and other plants perfect for concocting massage lubricants, and a natural lotion or oil will list such ingredients on the label. For instance, sea algae, aloe vera, jojoba oil, chamomile, grapeseed oil and safflower oil are all known to add skin-soothing and softening properties to massage lubricants.

Other naturally occurring ingredients, such as Paraguay tea, cucumber, Austrian dwarf pine oil and lemon peel, may also be part of the list, as extracts of these items are known to have desirable effects on those they touch, from calming the senses to rejuvenating the body and alleviating fatigue.

For the bodyworker who seeks a natural lubricant with pain-relieving properties, look for ingredients, such as Arnica montana, mint oil, ginger, violet leaf, eucalyptus, wintergreen and rosemary.

If you are still unsure whether a lubricant is natural, visit the manufacturer's Web site or contact the company for an explanation of the ingredients and the methods used to process them.

Personal regulation

Until an official definition of natural has been approved, it's up to the individual consumer to personally investigate what she chooses to purchase. Fortunately, a little determination should help separate the all-natural from the all-hype.

For more information, call Bon Vital at (800) 253-6466 or visit www.bonvital.com.

Maintaining a Natural Concern for Your Well-Being

The French-derived name Bon Vital has several meanings: "essentials for life," "full of life," "the good life" or "good health." Each reflects Bon Vitals commitment to providing massage therapists with superior products. Bon Vital founder Guenter Heidenberger is from Germany, where he earned a degree in general chemistry. In the early 1990s, he saw a need for another brand and manufacturer of professional massage-therapy products in the United States. With an

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overwhelming desire for natural over synthetic ingredients, he decided to make Bon Vital a one-of-a-kind company by using only the highest quality natural ingredients.

Since the F.D.A. doesn't define the term natural, it's up to manufacturers to carefully select ingredients. And with today's technology, it's more important than ever for manufacturers to stay educated on new advancements for cultivating and maintaining the highest quality ingredients.

Heidenberger is ever-vigilant in this regard: "Raw materials that are great performers today might be literally outdated overnight," he says. "The best way to keep your finger on the pulse of today's market is by constantly evaluating new and improved raw materials and extraction methods to maintain the highest quality standards."

Heidenberger's son, Tom Heidenberger, is Bon Vital's current president, and he maintains the same commitment as his father. "The massage industry is becoming more educated, so there's no reason to use synthetic skin-care ingredients when Mother Nature supplies us with many all-natural and organic ingredients," says Tom. "Our philosophy is to satisfy massage therapists' wants as well as their needs, and we'll do whatever it takes to formulate products meeting the request for all-natural and organic ingredients preservative-free of parabens."

Therapists should purchase from a company they know and trust to have their best interest at heart. And sometimes bigger is not always better. A family-owned and operated manufacturer that develops formulas in their own laboratories using the finest all-natural ingredients may serve you better than larger manufacturers, which may be more concerned with their bottom line than the quality of their products.

"Because we've remained a small, family-owned business," says Tom, "we can maintain a personal relationship with our customers and provide them with the customer service they deserve."

—Text supplied by Bon Vital

What's in a Name?

With the amazingly diverse amount of ingredients used in massage-therapy lubricants, examining a label can sometimes feel like you're reading a foreign language. But don't be intimidated if some of the ingredients have long names that are difficult to pronounce. Though they may sound like synthetic substances or chemicals, that's not always the case. International law calls for the use of a common nam-