

Dangers of using baby powder

Talcum powder is mainly made up of magnesium, silicon, and oxygen. It has been widely used for babies and children for preventing rashes, controlling perspiration, preventing irritation from diapers, for making the skin smooth, and for its nice smell. During the last century or so, its use in children has become a kind of ritual, and in most cases, it may be used even without any obvious reason.

Various brands of talcum powder have been aggressively promoted on the media. Though these companies do mention the primary components, the information that they do not provide is about the impurities. It is these impurities that may be the cause of various harms, especially if talcum powder is used as a staple.

The physiology and metabolism of babies are quite different from the adults. They have much smaller body weight and softer skin due to higher water content. Thus, what may seem a small amount to us, may be in fact quite a big amount of exposure for babies.

Now the question arises about what kind of risk are we talking about? These talcum powders are not medicine, so they have not undergone some kind of clinical trial. More importantly, each talcum powder may differ a bit from another. It is now a known fact that regular use of these powders can cause respiratory problems in children.

In the mid of 20th century, it was found that many of these talcum powders increased the risk of fatal diseases like lung cancer. Later it was discovered that the content of asbestos in these powders was responsible for this. Since the 1970s, all the talcum powders in the US were made asbestos free. But the big question remains about the unidentified impurities and the risks posed by them. Many companies selling these powders continue to claim their safety by stating that their powder does not contain asbestos. But what they would not tell that still, any talcum powder has many other impurities that could be potentially unsafe for children's health.

Perhaps the biggest scandal to hit the talcum powder industry and demonstrating the hidden risks associated with its regular use has been the cases of increased risk of ovarian cancer in women with the regular use of talcum powder. As per modern research, the risk of developing ovarian cancer in adult women increases by as much as 1.4 times. Further, cancer in women using talcum powder is more aggressive and more difficult to treat with modern chemotherapy.

Now the question arises that if a regular use of talcum powder can cause such a devastating effect on the health of adults, how can we be sure that they are not causing any effects on the child? More importantly, many of those side effects may become visible several years after the long-term exposure to these talcum powders. Thus, there is no way to claim that their regular use in children is completely safe.

But most probably these talcum powders are safe if they are used sparingly. The risk is primarily associated with their ritualistic use for no apparent reason.

About the author:

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Dr. Preet is a family physician; he has been practicing medicine for last 15 years and often sees children with various ailments in his day-to-day practice. He has a special interest in maternal and children's health. He is also a passionate writer.

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