THE CMC CLEAN LABEL CHEAT SHEET

What to put back on the shelf.

Screenshot it, print it, take it to the store. These are the ingredients we see most often on everyday labels, and the ones we keep out of everything we feature. The full standard, with every ingredient and the reason for it, lives on our Values & Standards page.

THE 30-SECOND LABEL CHECK

1. **Flip it over.**
   Ignore the front. "Natural", "clean" and "non-toxic" are not regulated claims.
2. **Read the first five.**
   Ingredients are listed by amount. The first five are most of what you are buying.
3. **Hunt the catch-alls.**
   "Fragrance", "parfum" and "natural flavors" can hide dozens of ingredients.
4. **Swap, don't panic.**
   One flag is a reason to compare, not to throw out your pantry.

GREEN FLAGS

Seals worth trusting

CMB Certified
Vetted for ingredients, operations, efficacy and social impact.

USDA Organic
Grown without synthetic pesticides or GMOs.

Non-GMO Project Verified
Independently tested for GMO avoidance.

Leaping Bunny
No animal testing at any stage of production.

MADE SAFE / EWG Verified
Screened against known harmful chemicals.

Seals mean a third party checked. Marketing words mean nobody did.

IN THE PANTRY

Food & drinks

Red 40, Yellow 5, Yellow 6, Blue 1
Petroleum-based dyes that add color only. Linked to hyperactivity in sensitive children; the EU requires a warning label.

Red No. 3 (erythrosine)
Caused thyroid tumors in animals. The FDA revoked it for food in 2025.

Partially hydrogenated oil
Source of artificial trans fats, which raise LDL cholesterol.

High-fructose corn syrup
Highly refined sweetener tied to excess added sugar and blood-sugar spikes.

Potassium bromate, bromated flour
Possible human carcinogen. Banned in the EU, Canada and California.

Azodicarbonamide
Dough conditioner banned in the EU.

BHA, BHT, TBHQ
Synthetic preservatives. BHA is "reasonably anticipated" to be a carcinogen (US NTP).

Sodium nitrite, sodium nitrate
Can form nitrosamines, linked to cancer, when cooked at high heat. Choose uncured.

Sodium benzoate + vitamin C
Together they can form benzene, a carcinogen.

Titanium dioxide
Banned as a food additive in the EU since 2022.

Aspartame, sucralose, acesulfame-K
Synthetic sweeteners with gut-microbiome and long-term safety questions.

"Natural flavors"
A catch-all term that can hide dozens of undisclosed compounds. Ask the brand.

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IN THE BATHROOM

Personal care & beauty

Fragrance / parfum
One word that can hide dozens of chemicals, including allergens and phthalates.

Parabens (methyl-, propyl-, butyl-)
Can mimic estrogen; suspected endocrine disruptors.

DMDM hydantoin, quaternium-15, imidazolidinyl / diazolidinyl urea, bronopol
Formaldehyde releasers. Formaldehyde is a known carcinogen and skin allergen.

Methylisothiazolinone
One of the most common causes of contact allergy. Banned in EU leave-on products.

Oxybenzone, octinoxate
Chemical UV filters absorbed through skin; linked to coral-reef damage. Banned in Hawaii.

Triclosan
Banned from US hand soap in 2016. Suspected endocrine disruptor.

PTFE, anything "perfluoro-"
PFAS "forever chemicals" that persist in the body and environment.

Coal tar
Known human carcinogen (IARC Group 1).

Hydroquinone
Skin lightener restricted in the US and banned in EU over-the-counter cosmetics.

DEA, TEA, cocamide DEA
Can form carcinogenic nitrosamines. California lists cocamide DEA.

Phthalates (DEP, DBP)
Plasticizers often hidden in "fragrance". Linked to hormone disruption.

Mineral oil, petrolatum
Petroleum-derived; can carry PAH contamination unless highly refined.

UNDER THE SINK

Home & cleaning

Benzalkonium chloride, "...ammonium chloride"
Quaternary ammonium compounds ("quats"). Linked to asthma and skin irritation.

Ammonia
Harsh on skin, eyes and lungs. Never mix with bleach.

Fragrance
Same problem as in personal care: undisclosed chemicals you breathe in.

2-Butoxyethanol
Solvent linked to blood and liver effects at high exposure.

Alkylbenzene sulfonates
Petroleum-derived surfactants, harmful to aquatic life.

EDTA
Does not break down easily and can mobilize heavy metals in waterways.

Microplastics, polymer beads
Do not biodegrade and end up in water and the food chain.

Triclosan, "antibacterial"
Contributes to antimicrobial resistance. Soap and water work.

Want the full list?

Every ingredient we keep out, with the reason, sorted by category and searchable:
crunchymamacollective.com/values-standards

Make products that pass?

Brands that meet this standard can apply for CMB Certification:
crunchymamacollective.com/cmb-certification

Sources include the US FDA, IARC, the US National Toxicology Program, EU regulations, the Environmental Working Group (EWG) and the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI).

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