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The Lowdown on Mineral Makeup

How mineral makeup compares to traditional makeup.

By [Shelley Levitt](#) Reviewed by [Laura J. Martin, MD](#)

WebMD Feature

Two of Hollywood's top makeup artists recently took a break from curling lashes and lining lips to offer WebMD their very different views of mineral makeup:

"I love it," says Kerry Herta, who earned a 2011 Emmy nomination for her work on the daytime soap *All My Children*. "I use a mineral foundation myself. It's so natural looking it's like a second skin, and on hot humid summer days it wears better than traditional liquid makeup."

"I'm not a big fan," says Tasha Reiko Brown, a regular on the Style Network's *How Do I Look*, who has won raves for the makeup she does on singer Florence Welch of the group Florence and the Machine. "I find it collects in fine lines and pores and accentuates dry flaky areas, while it catches in slick spots. And if you're a woman of color, it can be very difficult to find a shade that's a good match for your skin."

Women, of course, often disagree about the merits of makeup products. But the debate over mineral makeup is especially fierce, going beyond whether it offers a flawless glow or a cakey finish into questions of health and safety. Companies boast that their mineral makeup confers skin care benefits, while detractors raise alarms that the finely ground particles may be risky.

One thing is certain: Women are buying mineral makeup in greater numbers than ever. According to the market research group NPD, sales of mineral makeup from prestige brands were \$195 million last year, or 6% of the cosmetics sold in the U.S. And that hefty figure doesn't include mass drugstore lines such as Revlon, L'Oreal, and Neutrogena.

Mineral Makeup: Hype, Reality

Bare Escentuals started what it dubbed "the mineral revolution" when it launched its loose powder foundations in the mid 70s. Competing brands soon followed, all offering the claim that mineral makeup, made from crushed pure minerals, was more "natural" than conventional makeup.

Cosmetic chemists don't quite see a revolution. "I think mineral makeup is marketing hype," says Ni'Kita Wilson, a cosmetic chemist at Englewood Lab in New Jersey. Perry Romanowski, author of *Can You Get Hooked on Lip Balm? Top Cosmetic Scientists Answer Your Questions About the Lotions, Potions and Other Beauty Products You Use Every Day*, agrees. "All makeup is mineral makeup," he says. "You'll find the same mineral ingredients -- titanium dioxide, zinc oxide, mica and iron oxides -- in conventional products."

Contrary to what advertisements may suggest, those ingredients aren't simply mined, pulverized, and poured into compacts. "I'd like someone to show me a zinc oxide mine," Wilson says. "It doesn't exist. Zinc oxide is synthesized in the lab."

And though titanium dioxide, another mineral makeup mainstay, may start out with natural titanium, it undergoes an extraction and purification process in the lab, too. That's a good thing. "There isn't any natural source of titanium that's pure enough to be used in cosmetics," Romanowski says. "It's all contaminated with things like mercury and lead."

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[Beauty Q&A: Frizzy Hair Tamers](#)

In each issue of WebMD the Magazine, our experts answer your questions about skin care, beauty, makeup, hair care, and more. In our September 2010 issue, Lily Ramos, 35, a director of operations for a company in Orlando, Fla., asked for advice on dealing with frizzy, fly-away hair. For recommendations, we contacted both Ni'Kita Wilson, vice president of Cosmetech Laboratories in Fairfield, N.J. and Jet Rhys, celebrity stylist and owner of Jet Rhys Hair Salon, in San Diego. Q. My hair gets...

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