

The Rise of Ingredient Anxiety—Why Our Obsession With Scanning Beauty Products Is Becoming Toxic

Apps like Yuka claim to decode what’s in your beauty products. But how accurate are they?



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“I used to love this,” says the woman standing next to me in Boots. With a wistful sigh, she places the bottle of [serum](#) back on the shelf. The only thing standing between her and her favourite [Elemis Pro Collagen Renewal Serum](#) isn’t the £78 price tag but a carrot. “It only scored 33 on Yuka,” she whispers, by way of explanation.

Beauty scanning apps that determine the toxicity of your [skin](#) and [hair care](#) are booming. Arguably, the most famous of these is the Yuka App with its distinctive vegetable logo, which an estimated [5 million people in the UK](#) now consult for cosmetics and food purchases.

According to the brand’s website, what happens behind the scenes goes a little like this: Scanning a beauty product’s bar code with your phone pulls up its ingredients. [The Yuka App](#) then assigns a risk level to each one based on the potential effects to your health and the environment—for example, if it’s an allergen or carcinogen. It does so via an algorithm that’s managed by Yuka’s team, which includes a toxicologist, and takes into consideration data from bodies such as the European Chemicals Agency.

The database includes around 12,500 cosmetic ingredients, but the final safety score out of 100 is based on how much of the highest-risk ingredient is present in the product. A score of 75 to 100 earns a dark green risk-free dot; 50 to 74, a light green “good”; 25 to 49, an orange “poor”; and 0 to 24, a red “bad”, indicating the presence of potentially harmful ingredients.

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