A FREE GUIDE FROM INDIEFOG NATURALS®

The MCAS *Skincare* Guide

A label-reading companion for skin navigating MCAS.

INDIEFOG NATURALS®

Nervous System Skincare™ · indiefog.com

01 · BEFORE YOU START

You already know your skin.

You noticed which products left it hot or itchy, often long before anyone believed you.

This guide puts that noticing on paper. It starts with what a reaction can look like and how to read an ingredient list. Then it walks through the ingredients Mast Cell 360 suggests avoiding, the acids we leave out of everything we make, and the ingredients we choose to work with.

Every person with MCAS is different, and tolerance can shift over time for the same person. Treat everything here as a starting point for your own noticing.

> *This is a language for noticing. It is not a diagnosis, and it belongs alongside your doctors, never instead of them.*

03 · READING THE LABEL

How to read a label with MCAS

The full ingredient list, called the INCI, sits on the back of every product. That is where your answers are.

Order matters. Ingredients above 1% are listed from most to least. Below 1%, they can appear in any order.

“Fragrance” or “parfum” is one word standing in for many. A single fragrance can hold dozens of undisclosed ingredients.

Plants go by their Latin names. Butyrospermum Parkii is shea butter. Simmondsia Chinensis is jojoba. Essential oils and extracts show up this way too.

What a reaction can look like

Sometimes it shows up within minutes. Sometimes it builds over a few days of using something new.

These are the changes people with MCAS and reactive skin most often describe to us. Every body is different, and none of these on its own tells you what is causing it. Each one is worth writing down and bringing to your doctor.

Flushing. Heat and redness that rise in the face, neck or chest, sometimes within minutes of putting something on.

Hives and rashes. Raised, itchy welts, or a patch of redness that was not there before.

Burning with nothing to see. A sting or a burning feeling with no visible mark. Many people notice it most along the jawline, especially after products with acids.

Small red bumps around the mouth. Tiny clusters that look like little pimples, often around the lips and chin.

Breakouts that linger. A spot that keeps getting aggravated and takes far longer than usual to close up and fade.

What Kikki has noticed

> *"After five years of formulating with MCAS, I see a pattern on my own face. When a product carries a preservative or ingredient my mast cells react to, a regular breakout lingers. It keeps getting aggravated, and it does not close up and fade the way it should. When I am using ingredients my skin tolerates, a breakout comes and goes in its normal time."*
>
> Kikki Avila, founder and formulator · Your own pattern may look different.

Get emergency care right away for swelling of the lips, tongue or throat, or any trouble breathing.

Show your doctor any spot that lingers for weeks, or anything that looks different from your usual reactions.

This is a language for noticing. It is not a diagnosis, and it belongs alongside your doctors, never instead of them.

Find the preservative. Anything made with water needs one. Products made with no water at all, like many oils, balms and powders, usually need none.

Not every alcohol is a drying alcohol. Cetyl, cetearyl and stearyl alcohol are waxy ingredients made from plant oils, used to give creams their body. Alcohol denat. and SD alcohol are the drying kind. Benzyl alcohol is a third case: a preservative that is also a declared fragrance allergen in the EU.

Shorter lists mean fewer variables. When something does react, a short list makes it easier to find out why.

What “fragrance” really means

On a label, “fragrance,” “parfum” and “aroma” each stand for a scent blend whose parts don’t have to be listed. That blend can be synthetic or natural, or both.

Synthetic fragrance is made from aroma chemicals built in a lab. One word on the label can hide dozens of components. It is the trigger Mast Cell 360 flags most strongly.

“Natural fragrance” has no legal definition. It can still be an undisclosed blend, often built from aroma compounds isolated from plants. On the label it usually still reads “fragrance” or “parfum.” Until a brand tells you exactly what is in it, read it the same way you would read any fragrance.

Essential oils are concentrated oils pressed or distilled from a single plant. They are fragrant, and each one is listed by its own botanical name, such as Lavandula Angustifolia (Lavender) Oil. Mast Cell 360 treats them as separate from fragrance. They also note that clove, cinnamon and nutmeg can prompt mast cells to release histamine, and that chamomile can matter if you react to ragweed. Amount matters as well. A lightly scented product behaves differently from a heavily scented one.

Fragrance allergens are compounds that occur naturally in essential oils, such as linalool, limonene, geraniol and citronellol. EU rules require them to be named once they pass a set level. We follow that rule, so when a product of ours contains an essential oil, you’ll see these at the end of its ingredient list.

Unscented and fragrance-free

These words have no fixed definition across the industry. Some unscented products contain a masking fragrance to cover the smell of the base. On our labels, they mean this:

Fragrance-free means no synthetic fragrance, no essential oils and no benzyl alcohol.

Unscented means no added fragrance and no synthetic fragrance. These products contain benzyl alcohol as part of their preservative, and it is a declared fragrance allergen in the EU.

> We leave synthetic fragrance out of every product we make. Our facial line is essential-oil-free, and almost every product is available essential-oil-free.

04 · WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR

What Mast Cell 360 suggests avoiding

Mast Cell 360, the MCAS education site founded by Beth O'Hara, keeps a list of personal care ingredients to avoid. Some come with a reason. Others are listed with none. Their notes are paraphrased below, and their own pages have the full detail.

INGREDIENT	HOW IT CAN APPEAR ON A LABEL	MAST CELL 360'S NOTE
Fragrance	fragrance, parfum, aroma	Can hide undisclosed ingredients that often trigger mast cells
Potassium sorbate	potassium sorbate	Called a big mast cell trigger
Titanium dioxide	titanium dioxide, CI 77891	Called a known mast cell trigger
Petrolatum and silicones	petrolatum, dimethicone, cyclopentasiloxane	Called mast cell triggers
Harsh sulfates	sodium lauryl sulfate, sodium laureth sulfate	A skin irritant they link to mast cell activation
Alcohol	alcohol, alcohol denat., SD alcohol	Very drying to skin
Parabens	methyl-, ethyl-, propyl-, butyl-, isobutyl-, isopropylparaben	Flagged for health concerns

INGREDIENT	HOW IT CAN APPEAR ON A LABEL	MAST CELL 360'S NOTE
Nanoparticles	nano or micronized zinc oxide, micronized titanium dioxide, micronized quartz silica, fullerenes	Small particle size is the concern
Synthetic colors	FD&C or D&C followed by a number, Ext D&C Violet 2	Avoided entirely
Talc	talc	Contamination concerns
Antibacterials	triclosan	Can strip the skin's beneficial bacteria
Aluminum	aluminum compounds, common in antiperspirant	Flagged for health concerns
Metal-related ingredients	lead acetate, chromium, thimerosal, hydrogenated cottonseed oil, sodium hexametaphosphate	Flagged for health concerns
Baking soda	sodium bicarbonate	Can cause underarm rash for some people
Nail product solvents	toluene, formaldehyde, formalin	Not to be breathed in
Listed without a reason	sodium benzoate, citric acid, carrageenan, potassium triphosphate, sodium triphosphate, behentrimonium chloride, geraniol, clove, cinnamon	No reason given

Mast Cell 360 also lists xanthan gum. Most concern with it comes from eating it, so we don't treat it as a skincare concern. Their list is a general one. Your own triggers may sit inside it or outside it.

Where Indiefog stands on this list

Most of it is left out on purpose across our whole line. You won't find synthetic fragrance, potassium sorbate, titanium dioxide, petrolatum or silicones in anything we make. The same goes for SLS and SLES, drying alcohol, parabens, talc, synthetic dyes, citric acid and sodium benzoate. Our zinc oxide is non-nano.

One ingredient on the list is in some of our products, and you deserve to know where:

Clove is in Cooling Clarity and Deep Clarity, our menthol magnesium butters. Those two are made for people living with chronic illness, and we don't suggest them for MCAS.

Every product page on indiefog.com lists the full INCI, so you can check any product against your own list.

The acids we leave out

You may know the sting. Your face goes tight and warm an hour after something new, and it takes days to settle.

Mast Cell 360 names citric acid. The rest of these sit outside their list, and they are the ones we see set reactive skin off most often. That includes our founder's own skin, which lives with MCAS. So we leave them out of every product we make.

INGREDIENT	HOW IT CAN APPEAR ON A LABEL	WHY WE LEAVE IT OUT
Citric acid	citric acid	A common pH adjuster, and one of the most consistent triggers we hear about. We adjust pH with L-arginine instead.
L-ascorbic acid	ascorbic acid, L-ascorbic acid	The classic vitamin C, which needs a low pH to stay stable. Our vitamin C comes in oil-soluble forms that sit comfortably at your skin's own pH.
Salicylic acid	salicylic acid, BHA	An exfoliating acid. It is in nothing we make.
Harsh acids (AHAs)	glycolic acid, lactic acid, mandelic acid	Exfoliating acids that ask a lot of a reactive surface. They are in nothing we make.

The word "acid" on our labels

You may still see it, and you deserve to know why.

Hyaluronic acid, listed as sodium hyaluronate, holds water for a cushioned, hydrated feel. It does not exfoliate.

Fatty acids occur naturally in plant oils and butters. They are part of what makes an oil feel soft.

Dehydroacetic acid is part of the preservative in some of our water-based products, at a very small amount.

> Formulated for reactive, easily-overwhelmed skin. Left out on purpose is how we work: every acid on this page is one less thing your skin has to respond to.

Ingredients we choose to work with

These are ingredients we reach for when we formulate for reactive skin. Several also appear among Mast Cell 360's recommendations. None of them suits every person, so read each one against what you already know about your skin.

INGREDIENT	LABEL NAME	WHAT IT BRINGS	ALSO RECOMMENDED BY MAST CELL 360
Shea butter	Butyrospermum Parkii Butter	A rich, cushioned feel for very dry skin	Yes. They note a latex cross-reactivity consideration
Cocoa butter	Theobroma Cacao Seed Butter	A thick, softening butter	Yes. They note it is unfermented, unlike chocolate
Rosehip seed oil	Rosa Canina (Rosehip) Fruit Oil	Naturally rich in vitamin A compounds	Yes
Argan oil	Argania Spinosa Kernel Oil	A light, conditioning oil	Yes
Jojoba	Simmondsia Chinensis Seed Oil	A light oil close in feel to skin's own oils	Yes
Aloe	Aloe Barbadensis Leaf Water	A cool, hydrating base	Yes
Vitamin E	Tocopherol	Keeps oils fresh. Ours is sunflower-derived and non-GMO, never soy	Yes
Non-nano zinc oxide	Zinc Oxide	A mineral tint and soft finish in our Mineral Brightening Elixir	Yes, in non-nano form
Squalane	Squalane	A weightless, softening oil	Not on their list
Ceramides	Ceramide NP, Ceramide AP, Ceramide EOP	Supports a cushioned, comfortable feel	Not on their list
Glycerin	Glycerin	Draws in water for a hydrated feel	Not on their list
Niacinamide	Niacinamide	A smoother, more even look	Not on their list
Magnesium	Magnesium Chloride	The ingredient in our magnesium butters. Many people already associate it with rest	Magnesium appears in their deodorant pick

Shea, cocoa and argan come from tree nuts or seeds that some people react to. If you avoid nuts, check each product's allergen notes.

The Mineral Brightening Elixir is a tint. It is not a sunscreen and offers no sun protection.

07 · TRYING SOMETHING NEW

Give it a week.

One quick patch test can miss what a week of real use shows you. Here is the approach we suggest.

1. Introduce one new product at a time, so you know what you are noticing.
2. Start on a small area, like the inner forearm, before using it on your face.
3. Give it 5 to 7 days of regular use.
4. Include a harder day in that week. Skin that is fine on a calm day can respond differently during a flare.
5. Write down what you notice, along with anything else going on that day.

How you apply a product matters too. Light pressure and lukewarm water give your skin less to respond to, since heat and friction can be triggers on their own.

If your skin reacts, stop using the product and talk with your doctor.

08 · ABOUT US

Indiefog Naturals®

Indiefog is Nervous System Skincare™, made by hand in small batches by someone with MCAS and CPTSD.

We practice MCAS-aware formulation. Every ingredient is screened against common mast-cell triggers before it earns a place in the jar. We formulate by subtraction, so every ingredient left out on purpose is one less thing your skin has to respond to.

You can see every product's full INCI at indiefog.com.

Sources

Mast Cell 360, Safe Skincare for Those With Mast Cell Activation Syndrome, Beth O'Hara, last updated April 2025

Mast Cell 360, Safe Hand Moisturizers for Those With Mast Cell Activation Syndrome and Histamine Intolerance, Beth O'Hara

Mast Cell 360, Essential Oils for MCAS and Histamine Intolerance, Beth O'Hara

> *Indiefog products are cosmetics, made to cleanse, soften and comfort skin. They do not treat, cure or prevent any condition. Mast Cell 360's recommendations are their own and are shared here for education. Indiefog has no affiliation with Mast Cell 360.*