

body powder

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Body Powder

Absorbent powder applied to the body to reduce moisture, friction and odour. It has a real and underrated use — **preventing chafing and intertrigo in skin folds** — and it sits at the centre of the longest-running safety controversy in modern cosmetics.

What it is for

- **Friction.** Thighs, under the breasts, the groin, the armpits, between the toes. Powder reduces skin-on-skin friction, and for anyone who chafes in summer it works better than a cream, which adds moisture.
- **Moisture in skin folds. Intertrigo** — the inflamed, macerated rash that develops in warm damp folds — is prevented by keeping the fold dry. This matters in obesity, in immobility, and in older and bedbound people, where it is a genuine nursing concern.
- **Odour**, through moisture control and often sodium bicarbonate.
- **After a bath**, the traditional use, overlapping with [Dusting Powder](#).

The talc question

The most consequential unresolved question in this catalogue.

Talc is a mined mineral and in some deposits occurs alongside **asbestos**. Cosmetic-grade talc is specified and tested to be asbestos-free; an asbestos-contaminated cosmetic is **adulterated** under FD&C Act sec. 601. What has never existed is a **standardised, regulator-mandated test method** — which is exactly what MoCRA directed FDA to create:

- **MoCRA required FDA to promulgate standardised methods for detecting asbestos in talc-containing cosmetic products.**
- **A proposed rule issued in December 2024.**
- It was **withdrawn in November 2025**, leaving the requirement unfinalised.

Alongside that, litigation over talc-containing body powders — genital use and ovarian cancer, and occupational and consumer mesothelioma — has been extensive, has produced very large verdicts and settlements, and has **changed the market**: major manufacturers have reformulated to cornstarch or withdrawn talc powders entirely.

The proportionate reading: talc is not banned, asbestos is; the association is a contamination question rather than a property of talc; the testing framework is unfinished; **public health guidance now generally advises against perineal talc use**; and cornstarch, rice starch and tapioca starch alternatives work well.

Cornstarch, and the one caveat

Starch powders absorb well and avoid the talc question entirely. The occasionally repeated claim that **starch "feeds" candida** in a moist fold is weakly supported and is not a reason to avoid it for ordinary use — but if a fungal infection is present, the answer is an **antifungal**, not a change of powder.

Inhalation

A separate and genuine issue. **Applying loose powder generates a respirable cloud**, and that is not something to do daily in a small bathroom, for talc or for starch. Apply low to the body, press the puff rather than shaking it, ventilate, and never near an infant — aspiration of powder is a recognised paediatric emergency. See [Baby Powder](#).

Where it sits in the rules

Cosmetic in the US — FDA primary categories **(12) personal cleanliness** and **(05) fragrance preparations**, which explicitly covers dusting and talcum powders. **No premarket approval**. Colour additives, where present, must be approved for the intended use.

It becomes an **OTC drug** with an antifungal or skin-protectant claim at monograph level. Powders containing **zinc oxide** with a protectant claim fall under the skin protectant monograph.

In the EU, talc is permitted under the general safety requirement, and **asbestos is prohibited under Annex II** — 1,766 entries. Named fragrance allergens must be individually declared.

Shelf life

Two to three years or more. A dry powder has essentially no microbial risk and its only enemy is

moisture — a caked powder has been damp.

Do not share a puff, which is a used applicator that has been over skin repeatedly. Keep the container closed and out of the shower steam.

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- [Bath and Body](#) — the shelf this sits on, and the rest of it.
- [Cosmetics](#) — what the label is legally allowed to say, and the full catalogue.
- *Powders* — this is the only entry in its group.
- [Dusting Powder](#) · [Baby Powder](#) · [Foot Powder and Spray](#) — the same question elsewhere.
- Regulatory statements here follow the FDA and EU sources listed on [Cosmetics](#), read 16 August 2026.