

setting powder

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Setting Powder

Powder applied over liquid or cream makeup to lock it in place. The distinction from [Face Powder](#) is functional rather than compositional: a setting powder is chosen for what it does to the layer beneath it, not for coverage of its own.

How "setting" works

Liquid and cream makeup stays mobile until its vehicle has evaporated and, in oily areas, remains vulnerable to sebum breaking the film. A powder layer does three things:

1. **Absorbs the residual moisture and oil**, so the film sets rather than slides.
2. **Reduces surface tack**, so makeup does not transfer onto collars, phones or hands.
3. **Physically separates** the makeup from fresh sebum arriving from below.

That is the whole mechanism. It is real, it is significant, and it is also the thing that makes over-powdered makeup look flat, because a matte scattering layer removes the specular highlights that read as skin.

Translucent, tinted, and the flashback problem

"Translucent" is not "colourless". Most translucent setting powders are built on white or near-white solids, and the one that causes trouble is **titanium dioxide**, which is brilliantly opaque to visible light and reflects strongly under a camera flash. The result is **flashback** — a pale grey-white mask in photographs, on exactly the areas that were powdered most.

Powders that avoid it are built on silica, mica, sericite and starches with little or no titanium dioxide. If photographs matter, test with a flash before an event rather than after it.

Baking, and its cost

"Baking" is applying a thick layer of loose powder to a damp concealed area, leaving it several minutes while body heat sets the makeup beneath, then dusting the excess away. It genuinely produces a long-wearing, crease-resistant under-eye — and it is a technique built for **stage and studio lighting**, where a heavy matte finish reads correctly.

On dry, mature or textured skin in ordinary light it emphasises every line it settles into. Press a small amount into the areas that crease, rather than piling it on.

Applying it

- **Press and roll with a puff or a dense brush.** Sweeping drags the makeup underneath.
- **Only where needed** — T-zone, under-eye, around the nose. Powdering a dry cheek achieves nothing and costs the finish.
- **A little.** Tap the excess off the brush every time.
- **Set, then mist.** A [Setting Spray](#) over powder removes the powdery look and melts the layers together.

Where it sits in the rules

Cosmetic — FDA primary category (08) makeup preparations (not eye), or (03) eye makeup preparations for anything applied under or around the eye, where **only colour additives approved for eye-area use** are permitted. Certified colours must come from **FDA-certified batches**.

The **talc** question applies here as it does to all cosmetic powders: talc is permitted, asbestos contamination renders a cosmetic adulterated under FD&C Act sec. 601, and MoCRA's directed rulemaking on standardised asbestos testing methods was proposed in December 2024 and **withdrawn in November 2025**. Loose powders also carry a genuine **inhalation** consideration, which is why applying them heavily in a small enclosed room is worth avoiding.

Shelf life

Low water activity means slow microbial growth: **18–24 months** after opening. The real failure is the **puff**, which returns sebum and skin flora to the pan every use. Wash or replace puffs; wash brushes weekly; scrape the hardened glaze off a pressed powder rather than digging through it.

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- Regulatory statements here follow the FDA and EU sources listed on [Cosmetics](#), read 16 August 2026.