



MAKING A HEALTHIER HOME

Cast Toxins From Your Living Space

Take a look around your home. Do you know what's in your household goods and products? Some chemicals can harm your health if too much gets into your body. Becoming aware of potentially harmful substances and clearing them out can help keep you and your family healthy.

“There's a range of chemicals that you can be exposed to in your home, generally at very low levels,” says Dr. Andrew Rooney, a toxicology and risk expert at NIH. Possible toxic substances can be found in building materials, cookware, cleaning products, shower curtains, furniture, carpet, and other common items.

Not all chemicals are harmful. In fact, most substances in our environment are likely safe, explains Dr. Heather Patisaul, a neuroscience and toxicology expert at North Carolina State University. “Only a small subset is probably toxic,” she says. “Although that's worrisome, there are many simple things you can do to help minimize your exposure.”

WHAT'S HARMFUL?

Sometimes it's obvious when a chemical is hazardous. You may get a rash from spilling a household cleaner on your skin. Or you may start coughing when you breathe in irritating fumes. To avoid known

health risks, be sure to read the instructions carefully on your household products, and follow any safety precautions.

Some toxic chemicals cause no immediate or clear symptoms. Lead, for example, is well known for its poisonous effects. Generally, the more lead you have in your body, the more likely you'll have health problems. Lead can cause high blood pressure, fertility problems, muscle and joint pain, and memory and concentration problems. As a result, lead is no longer allowed in paints, gasoline, and cans used for food. But lead can still be found in lead-based paint used in older homes, household dust, and

drinking water pumped through leaded pipes.

Substances thought to cause bodily disruption include certain fragrances, pesticides, and stain-resistant coatings. Researchers are studying the health effects of several types of chemical classes tied to hormone disruption, including phthalates (pronounced THAL-ates), PFCs (or perfluorinated chemicals), and flame retardants.

Phthalates are a family of man-made chemicals used to make plastics, cleaners, and fragrances. In animals, phthalate exposure has been linked to many reproductive health and developmental problems. To reduce your exposure, read product labels and avoid using products that contain phthalates. Some—but not all—phthalate-containing products might be clearly labeled: “contains phthalates.” But sometimes phthalates might be listed as a 3- or 4-letter abbreviation, such as BBP, DBP, or DEP. These phthalates must be listed among the ingredients on product labels, unless they are added as a part of the “fragrance.”

PFCs are widely used to make everyday products more resistant to stains, grease, and water. They can be found in nonstick cookware, stain-resistant sofas and carpets, and waterproofed clothing and mattresses. In animal studies, some PFCs disrupt normal hormone activity, reduce immune system function, or cause developmental problems. Some evidence suggests that certain PFCs may also affect human health, with possible ties to low birth weight, obesity, and testicular and kidney cancers.

Flame retardants are added or applied to materials to slow or prevent a fire. But a growing body of evidence links many of these chemicals to negative health effects in animals and humans. Flame retardants can be found in foam, upholstery, mattresses, carpets, curtains, and fabric blinds. Flame retardant use has been declining in recent years. But these chemicals are still found in some products. When buying new items, especially for children, try to

purchase furnishings filled with cotton, polyester, or wool, instead of polyurethane foam.

Chemicals are everywhere, and most are harmless. Limiting the potentially toxic ones in your day-to-day life can help you create a safer, healthier home.

Learn what’s in the products you purchase, and make informed decisions. You can also take steps to get rid of risky chemicals by keeping the dust down in your house.

KEEP INDOOR SPACES HEALTHY

To reduce potentially toxic substances in your home:

- Clean with “Safer Choice” or non-toxic products.
- Dust using a damp rag.
- Use a wet mop to clean floors.
- Vacuum with a high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter.
- Open a window or use a fan to improve air circulation when you’re cleaning.
- Have and maintain a good ventilation system in your home.
- Wash your hands and your children’s hands often.

