

Toxin Reducing Tips in Your Home

Toxins are ingested in our food, absorbed by our skin and inhaled in the air we breathe. Too many toxins in our body can make us sick, and are linked to problems such as cancer and birth defects. As about 700 new chemicals are introduced annually (in the US alone), with very few of these being tested for toxicity and safety, it is important to reduce the amount of toxins in your environment.

Personal care products

- Avoid using antibacterial soaps. Antibacterial agents, contribute to the growing problem we face when bacteria mutate to strains that are more drug-resistant. Hand-washing with any soap is still vital to maintaining good health. Triclosan is a hormone disruptor that builds up in our bodies. Found in some anti-bacterial hand soaps, studies show it is actually no more effective at removing germs or preventing illness than plain soap and water.
- Use eye drops, contact lens solutions, and nasal sprays and drops that are free of thimerosal or other mercury-containing preservatives.
- Read the label to avoid chemicals like parabens, sodium laureth sulphate, and oxybenzone.
- Over 12,000 chemicals are used in personal care products – 89% of them haven't been reviewed for safety.
- Check the products you are using at: <http://www.ewg.org/skindeep/>.

Cleaning products

- Dust often with a wet mop or vacuum to reduce exposure to lead.

Air freshener

- Avoid store-bought air fresheners – they emit dozens of different chemicals into the air, some of which are toxic and hazardous.
- Simmer a mixture of cloves and cinnamon or use vinegar and water as an alternative.
- Do not burn candles unless you know their ingredients and where they were manufactured. Benzene, toluene and ketones have been found in the air after paraffin candles are burned.
- Unscented is not the same as fragrance free.

Laundry and bathroom

- Use a combination of borax and washing soda in your machine – cheaper and just as effective.
- Choose fragrance-free detergents.
- Hang clothes to dry – they will last longer.
- Avoid bleach when possible, or use non-chlorine bleach which is highly effective.
- Clothes that have been dry cleaned emit perchlorethylene, a chemical that causes cancer. An alternative, “wet cleaning” emits no harmful gases.
- Use a squeegee for wiping down tiles after showering and there will be less hard-water and soap scum build-up to have to remove.

Alternatives

- Baking soda can be used to scrub sinks and tubs, while vinegar mixed with water works well for most surfaces, including windows and floors.
- Rubbing alcohol is effective in cleaning windows and mirrors.
- For non-toxic home cleaning products: http://eartheasy.com/live_nontoxic_solutions.htm or <http://www.womensvoices.org/get-involved/green-cleaning-parties/green-cleaning-recipes/>

Your home

Indoor air pollution

- Studies have shown that levels of harmful chemicals in indoor air may exceed the standards set by the Environmental Protection Agency to protect us from harmful chemicals (3-5 times more polluted than outdoor air).
- Remove your shoes when you enter your house. Your shoes can track in harmful amounts of pesticides, lead, cadmium and other chemicals. Use a front door mat.
- Vacuum carpets and floors regularly. Use a fine particulate filter, such as a HEPA filter, in your vacuum cleaner, if possible. Otherwise, the dust vacuumed up is redistributed into the air where it can be inhaled.
- Wash mould and mildew off any hard surface and keep the surface dry to avoid re-growth. Using exhaust fans and open windows also helps eliminate unwanted humidity.
- Do not smoke inside.
- Never leave the car or lawn mower running in the garage or shed.
- Wash bedding weekly in hot water to kill dust mites.
- Buy some plants! Plants produce the oxygen that makes life possible, add moisture and filter toxins. Indoor plants can reduce pollutants in your home:
 - Aloe Vera: eliminates emissions from most toxic materials, and is good for skin care
 - Chrysanthemum: toxins such as formaldehyde, benzene and ammonia
 - Fig Trees: reduces formaldehyde
 - Spider Plants: exceptional for eliminating formaldehyde
 - Chinese Evergreen, Bamboo Palm and Lillies: many toxic chemicals



Controlling pests

- Remove all pest food sources, and block entrances.
- Avoid using no-pest strips as they contain pesticides that are released to the air in your home.
- Avoid mothballs that contain p-dichloro benzene or naphthalene, which are very toxic and contribute to respiratory problems. Instead, use cedar chips or blocks.
- Make your own bug-spray with this easy recipe:
<http://www.savingcentswithsense.net/2009/03/make-your-own-non-toxic-bug-spray/>
- When treating your pet and yard for fleas or ticks, check with your veterinarian for safe alternatives.

Building and renovating

- Ask for materials that are low in formaldehyde and other volatile organic compounds (shown to cause cancer or developmental problems).
- If you are removing leaded paint, use the services of a certified lead abatement specialist as even the dust may be toxic.
- Air out a house for 48 hours after installing carpet.
- Avoid using 'green-treated' timber, particularly for eating surfaces and children's play equipment.

Cooking and food

- Choose organics where possible and rinse all fruits and vegetables thoroughly to remove fertiliser residues. Alternatively, soak it for 10 minutes in a 50% vinegar solution, and then rinse to remove pesticides.
- Do not microwave foods in plastic containers, as chemicals can be absorbed by food. Cover with waxed paper or paper towel instead of plastic wrap to keep food from spattering.
- Use a filter for drinking water.
- When heated to 230°C, Teflon or non-stick cookware releases a chemical linked to developmental harm and cancer. Keep the stove at or below medium heat or opt for cast iron or stainless steel pans for cooking.

Selecting products

- Read the label and look for 'signal words' such as: caution, warning, danger and poison. Caution is the least hazardous and danger is most hazardous. Choose the least-hazardous product to do the job.
- Follow the instructions. Be sure to use the correct amount of a product – you won't get twice the results by using twice as much.
- Plant based materials such as oils made from citrus, seed, vegetable or pine are biodegradable and generally less toxic. Also made from renewable resources!
- Choose pump spray containers instead of pressurised aerosols.
- Use unbleached paper products where possible.

In the garden

- Mow your grass to a height of 3½ inches – needs less watering and creates shade, making it harder for weeds to establish.
- Only apply as much fertiliser as is required.

Vehicle and garage

- Prevent vehicle fluids such as oil and antifreeze from entering a storm drain by disposing of them properly.
- Contain spilled fluids with rags or kitty litter.
- Dispose of unwanted chemicals at a household hazardous waste collection centre in your area. The Hawkesbury City Waste Management Facility is located on The Driftway, South Windsor.



Certain chemicals

BPA (Bisphenol-A)

- BPA is commonly found in can liners and plastic products.
- Risk: hormone-related health impacts such as increased risk of cancer, infertility, obesity and diabetes.
- Look for plastics labelled 'BPA-free'.
- Opt for fresh or frozen fruit and vegetables instead of canned foods.
- Do not recycle receipts as they can contain BPA which might contaminate other recyclables.

Lead

- A common additive in house paint, gasoline and plumbing fixtures until the 1970s.
- Risk: problems for the nervous system, kidneys, blood and mental and physical development.

Mercury

- Exposure can come from breaking a mercury-containing household product as well as being in our food chain (especially through large fish such as tuna).
- Risk: memory and attention deficits, tremors, stinging and/or burning of the extremities.

Pesticides

- Used to kill plants and insects.
- Risk: cancer, birth defects, hormone disruption, and nervous system problems.

PVC

- In plastic products from toys and cookware to shower curtains.
- Risk: hormone disruption, reproductive and developmental harm, and other serious health problems.
- Never microwave plastic.
- Store food in glass.
- Choose plastics with the recycle symbol 4 and 5 – indicates PVC-free plastics.

Radon

- Colourless, odourless radioactive gas that comes from the natural decay of uranium found in nearly all soils.
- Risk: lung cancer.
- The Environmental Protection Agency provides more information:
<http://www.epa.gov/radon/pubs/consguid.html>.

Volatile Organic Compounds

- Found in paint, glue, solvents, and many household cleaning products.
- Of 133 unique VOCs emitted from a sample of consumer products, including six cleaning products, each product tested emitted between one and eight chemicals classified as toxic or hazardous.

