

# Chemicals in the home

## Top Ten Toxins

Here are 10 common hazardous chemicals found in cleaning products that you may want to eliminate from your home.

- 1. Acetone** - spot treatment cleaners, mark and scuff removers. May cause liver and kidney damage and harm a developing fetus.
- 2. Bisphenol A** - Found plastic water and baby bottles and lining some cans. Known hormone disruptor linked to prostate and breast cancer.
- 3. Bleach/sodium hypochlorite** - dye, skin and respiratory irritant, suspected to be toxic to the brain and liver.
- 4. DEA (Diethanolamine)** - Foaming and emulsifying agent linked to cancer, respiratory and nervous disorders.
- 5. Formaldehyde** - Used in hundreds of products. Suspected carcinogen toxic to immune, nervous, reproductive and respiratory systems and skin irritant.
- 6. Fragrances** - Family of chemicals linked to brain disorders, asthma and cancer
- 7. Napthalene** - Pest repellent and deodorizer is a carcinogen and may affect developmental, neurologic and lung function.
- 8. Phosphoric Acid** - Dishwasher detergents, metal polishes, disinfectants and bathroom cleaners. Suspected neurotoxin and respiratory toxin.
- 9. Sodium lauryl sulfate** - Lathering agent in cleaners. Known skin irritant, suspected liver toxin.
- 10. Triclosan** - Antimicrobial agent in many products. Affects immune and hormone function, linked to cancer.

## Household Chemicals

Lurking. That might be the best way to describe the hidden toxins in your home. It is a safe bet that toxic chemicals in your home are also in your family's bodies. If you can get rid of potentially harmful chemicals and replace them with safer items, you and your family will be better off. By not buying harmful chemicals, you will also join the consumer movement that is ultimately what drives corporations to make safer products.

A recent study by Environmental Defence showed that Canadians from age 10 to 75 had toxic chemicals polluting their bodies, no matter where they lived. This shows that it is not just the air you breathe outside the home that can put you at risk - what is inside the home matters too.

## **Cleaning products**

There are virtually thousands of household chemicals that are believed to cause health problems, and the list is growing. Some of the biggest concerns are increased risk of:

- several cancers
- ADHD, mood disorders and brain function
- infertility and menstrual problems
- thyroid and other hormone problems

The most obvious place to look for toxins in your home is conventional household cleaning products. Unfortunately, Canada does not have any laws that force manufacturers to list ingredients on their labels. A good rule of thumb is that a product with a scary label telling you to call poison control in case of ingestion or skin contact is probably not your safest choice. Many companies using less-toxic ingredients are eager to tell you about them, so they put them on bold labels or info sheets in stores.

What should you be looking for? The list of toxins is long, but the most common and dangerous offenders under the sink are ammonia, formaldehyde, hydrochloric acid, phenol and sodium hypochlorite (also known as bleach). Another thing to keep in mind is that you might not need the product at all. It is just clever marketing that has made us believe that for every chore there is a super-specialized “must have” product.

This is all well and good, but in the end we need to clean our homes. Thankfully, we can turn to our grandmothers. If you try them, you will discover that the old-fashioned household cleaners actually work. For example, a very effective all purpose cleaner can be made by dissolving four tablespoons of baking soda in four cups of warm water. Pour it into a spray bottle and you are done. No ammonia, no bleach, no synthetic fragrances, no carcinogens, reproductive toxins or irritants.

What could be safer than a cleaning product we also use in food? Yes, vinegar. This salad dressing does double-duty as an antibacterial and a grease and grime-fighter. Mix equal parts of vinegar and water in a spray bottle to make yourself a glass and window cleaner, or use it full strength to sponge down your bathtub, then scrub with baking soda. Do the same to your toilet bowl.

Kids helping you decorate by putting stickers on your furniture and walls? Moisten them with vinegar, let them sit for ten minutes, and just wipe them off. You can even ask them to do it - another benefit of using safer cleaning products is that the kids can safely get in on the action without ingesting harmful chemicals.

These are just a few examples - there are many more. If you are not yet ready to make your own cleaners, there are a handful of companies that are now making non-toxic products that can do the job well and are now available in most grocery stores.

## **Other hidden toxins**

Cleaning products are not the only problem. In the modern home, harmful chemicals might be anywhere - silently polluting the air. Furniture, carpets, non-stick cookware, plastic containers, curtains, blinds - everything that isn't found in nature should be checked for safety.

Perfluorinated chemicals, commonly used as stain repellents, are linked to many cancers and disrupt normal hormone function. They are found in furniture, carpets and clothing and in non-stick cookware. BFRs (brominated flame retardants) are used in upholstered furniture, mattresses, curtains, carpets, electronics and even some children's clothing. One family of BFRs is called PBDE (polybrominated diphenyl ethers) - a suspected hormone disruptor, carcinogen and particularly damaging to the thyroid. PBDEs are released

from products into the air and onto other surfaces, and they have been detected in house dust, human blood and breast milk.

Let us not forget the chemical that has been in the headlines for much of this past year – Bisphenol A. It is a known hormone disruptor with estrogen-like activity that promotes infertility and can cause birth defects and cell damage that may lead to prostate and breast cancer later in life. Bisphenol A is lurking in plastic food and drink containers, some baby bottles and in plastic food wrap.

While you are not expected to rip out your carpets, get rid of your furniture and all your cleaning products tomorrow, you should do what you can. To help you detox your home, there are a few websites you can turn to. An excellent resource is [www.lesstoxicguide.ca](http://www.lesstoxicguide.ca). This site is loaded with information about the potential health risks of commonly used products,. It can help you find less toxic personal care and baby products and household cleaners.

Another great website is [www.toxicnation.ca](http://www.toxicnation.ca). Here you can tap into the latest achievements of environmental lobbyists and policy makers. It also has a great interactive link that takes you on a virtual tour of every room in an online home and identifies what toxins to watch out for. It also has information on how you can get tested for chemicals and pollutants.

The purpose of this article is not make you afraid of your home. It is to help you make better choices. Learning about the potential risks will help you find safer alternatives to the chemicals around you every day. You cannot avoid them completely, but the more you do, the safer you'll be. Detoxing your home will help you detox your body.

Compiled from Guide to Less Toxic Products and the U.S. National Institutes of Health Library of Medicine Household Products Database.

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Reference website: <http://www.seekerscentre.com/information/chemicals-in-the-home/>