

Are you being exposed?

Not all chemicals are harmful. However, some are capable of causing cancer (carcinogens) and others can interfere with normal hormone functions; these are known as endocrine disrupting chemicals or EDCs. Some EDCs mimic the female hormone, oestrogen; increased levels of this hormone is a known risk factor for breast cancer.

This mini guide will help you to identify what to look out for and what to avoid.

Cosmetics and personal care products:

Watch out for:

- Parabens such as butyl/methyl/ethyl/propyl paraben: found in cosmetics, body creams, hair products and sunscreens
- Alkyl parahydroxybenzoate: another name for parabens
- Aluminium in deodorants/antiperspirants
- Synthetic musks (or parfum): used as fragrance in many cosmetics and personal care products
- Triclosan: used in toothpastes and hand washes
- Benzophenones in cosmetics: used to prolong shelf life

How to avoid:

- Opt for paraben-free personal care products
- Opt for aluminium-free anti-perspirants
- Choose essential oil-based fragrances or un-fragranced products
- Avoid using antibacterial soaps and hand washes which contain triclosan

Plastic containers, bottles and packaging

Watch out for

- Bisphenol A (BPA) and other bisphenols: in hard plastic polycarbonates
- Polyvinyl chloride (PVC): in cling film and some children's lunch boxes
- Polyethylene terephthalate (PET): used in plastic bottles containing drink or food - do not re-use or heat

How to avoid:

- Avoid plastic bottled drinks
- Opt for tap water or use stainless steel bottles
- Don't allow drinks in PET containers to become warm for prolonged periods
- Discard old plastic plates, beakers, cups and cutlery.
- Do not reuse, refill or heat plastics (containing food or drink) labelled recycling code 7 (various plastics, which may contain BPA), code 3 (PVC, which may release potentially harmful plasticisers or vinyl chloride) or code 1 (PET, which may leach antimony)

Fresh food and confectionary

Watch out for:

- Pesticides: on non-organic fruit and veg
- Parabens: used in confectionery

How to avoid:

- Choose organic and locally grown products
- Avoid confectionery containing E214, E215, E218 and E219

Tinned Food

Watch out for:

- Bisphenol A (BPA) or other bisphenols: used in resins to line tin cans

How to avoid:

- Opt for fresh not tinned food
- Source tins labelled BPA-free

Garden Sprays

Watch out for:

- Insecticides, herbicides and fungicides: used to treat garden and household plants

How to avoid:

- Go organic in the garden
- Avoid using insecticides, fungicides and herbicides
- Remove or deter garden and household pests by other methods, such as mesh netting and biological pest control for glasshouses and some outdoor plants

Household cleaners

Watch out for:

- Triclosan / Microban: used in chopping boards, jay cloths and washing up liquid
- Phthalates ("fragrance" or "parfum"): used in cleaners and dishwashing liquids and air fresheners
- Synthetic musks: used in washing powders, detergents, air fresheners

How to avoid:

- Regular cleaning with hot soap and water is sufficient for good household hygiene
- Avoid unnecessary use of antimicrobials - these can kill beneficial bacteria too
- Use citric acid based cleaners and avoid scented washing agents

Soft furnishings and other household items

Watch out for:

- "Organic" flame retardants (brominated, organophosphorus or chlorinated flame retardants) are used as flame retardants in furniture, carpets, and other soft furnishings

How to avoid:

- Choose less flammable materials such as leather, wool and cotton for home furnishings. If listed, avoid brominated, chlorinated or organophosphorus flame retardants (e.g. TBBPA: tetrabromobisphenol A, TDCPP: tris(1,3, dichloro-2-propyl) phosphate