

Protect your baby's health

Reduce your exposure to harmful chemicals in the home



Give your baby the best start in life

During pregnancy most of us will take steps to protect the health of our baby, such as eating healthy foods, taking vitamins and avoiding alcohol and smoking.

But did you know that early exposures to certain chemicals found in everyday products may also impact the health of your unborn child?

Although we can't avoid everything, there are a number of simple things we can do to help reduce our exposure to potentially harmful chemicals.

This guide provides tips and advice on what to look out for and what to try and avoid.



Growing concern about exposures to harmful chemicals

During pregnancy we avoid alcohol and smoking because we know that they have been linked to developmental problems in children. More recently there has been growing concern that pre-natal exposures to other harmful chemicals, known as endocrine disrupting chemicals or EDCs, may increase the risk of certain health problems such as childhood obesity, asthma and adult diseases such as endometriosis and breast cancer.



Which chemicals are considered potentially harmful?

Carcinogens – cause cancer by directly damaging our DNA or by disrupting our cells' metabolic processes (chemical reactions). Cancerous cells divide in an uncontrolled manner and are capable of spreading to other parts of the body.

EDCs – can mimic or interfere with our hormones leading to cell changes that may increase the risk of developing cancers and other diseases.

Carcinogens and suspected EDCs can be found in a range of everyday products including food, cosmetics, hair products, deodorants, nail polish, kitchen cleaners, packaging and new baby equipment.

EDCs and breast cancer

Whilst the female hormone oestrogen is important for reproductive development and pregnancy, high levels of this hormone are associated with increased risk of breast cancer. Certain EDCs act in a similar way to natural oestrogen and may also increase breast cancer risk.

How do harmful chemicals enter the body?

Over time, products may release harmful chemicals which may be inhaled as we breathe, absorbed through our skin or ingested through our food and drink.



REFERENCES

For a complete list of references used to make this guide please visit our website: breastcanceruk.org.uk/reduce-your-risk/protect-your-babys-health

DISCLAIMER

This information has been written for members of the public to help them understand more about how and why certain chemicals may be linked to a potentially increased risk of breast cancer.

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Breast Cancer UK works to tackle the environmental and chemical causes of breast cancer.

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Top Tips

- 1 Eat a healthy diet, rich in organic fruit and vegetables and limit processed and canned food.
- 2 Avoid exposure to garden and household pesticides, solvents and synthetic sprays.
- 3 Reduce the number of cosmetic and cleaning products you use.
- 4 Choose natural materials and buy organic products whenever possible.
- 5 Do your research: Check ingredient lists before you buy and look out for the EU Ecolabel or Soil Association Certification label.

Making these changes doesn't have to be difficult, and small steps are better than none! There are many products available which do not contain harmful chemicals. Look online for natural lifestyle blogs, top tips and creative ways to reduce your exposures to potentially harmful chemicals. Remember these simple rules:

- Reduce** how much you use
- Replace** with natural alternatives
- Research** before you buy

Garage and garden

We hope you'll put your feet up and enjoy your garden rather than spending lots of time weeding it. However, if you do want to keep on top of the gardening:

- Ditch pesticides and fungicides – check out what's in your garden shed and garage and dispose of unwanted pesticides responsibly.
- Always wear gardening gloves; and goggles even when using organic sprays.
- Remove garden pests by hand and if you can, pull out weeds by hand. Alternatively, get your other half or bestie to do it for you if you're too pregnant!
- Try growing your own organic fruit and veg – a small window box of lettuce is a good place to start.



The office

It's important to ensure your working environment is as safe as possible: talk to your employer if you have concerns about potentially hazardous substances in the work place. If you do work from home:

- Avoid changing printer cartridges or photocopier toner: if you need to, wear disposable gloves.
- Always work in a well-ventilated environment.
- As an alternative to air fresheners, use house plants as natural air detoxifiers, and fresh flowers for scent.

Visit our website for more tips and advice on how you can reduce your exposure to harmful chemicals:
www.breastcanceruk.org.uk

Bathroom

You're pregnant – time for some pampering before your little ones arrive – right? RIGHT! But choose your products carefully.

- Minimise use of beauty products and cosmetics.
- Avoid cosmetics that contain parabens, phthalates, fragrances (parfum); deodorants/antiperspirants that contain these and aluminium, and toothpaste and soaps that contain triclosan.
- Try not to apply products all over your body on a regular basis (e.g. spray tans).
- Avoid hair dyes, especially those that contain para phenylenediamine (PPD), nonylphenol, resorcinol or ammonia.
- Avoid using wet wipes, especially those that contain synthetic fragrances.



Bedrooms and baby's room

It is natural to 'feather the nest' and decorate rooms before your new arrival. If you do, here are some tips:

- Use water-based paints and choose products marked 'Low VOC'.
- When decorating, always ensure adequate ventilation and wear protective gloves and mask.
- Avoid removing old paint: it may contain lead.
- Avoid installing new carpets or laminate flooring (especially those that contain biocides and waterproof sprays).
- Try natural products such as wood, cork or ceramic tiles and organic products which contain fewer harmful chemicals.
- Avoid buying plywood furniture as it may emit formaldehyde, and air all newly-bought furniture.
- Wash new clothes and linen before first use. Source organic cotton if possible: it's likely to contain fewer harmful chemicals.



Living and dining room

Relax and enjoy your maternity leave but make sure your living space is free from harmful chemicals:

- Avoid synthetic fragrances, scented candles, air fresheners and perfumed cleaning products.
- Keep rooms aired, and dust and vacuum regularly.
- Use bowls of herbs such as rosemary and sage to add a pleasant fragrance to rooms.
- Avoid using fly sprays and flea powder. If you can't avoid using them, make sure you wear gloves and a mask, or better still ask someone else to apply them.
- Find alternatives to plastic tableware.



Kitchen

You (and your baby) are what you eat – so it's important to try and reduce intake of potentially harmful chemicals from food and drink.

- Eat fresh, preferably organic fruit and vegetables.
- Wash fresh food thoroughly to remove pesticide residues.
- Limit your consumption of processed and canned food.
- Discard old plastic bottles and their food content, especially if plastic is scratched. Choose stainless steel drinks bottles.
- Avoid storing food in plastic containers or cling film. Use glass, ceramic, stainless steel or Pyrex for food and drinks storage and microwaving.
- Avoid plastics marked:
 - ♻ Polyethylene terephthalate (PET)
 - ♻ Polyvinyl chloride (PVC)
 - ♻ Polystyrene (PS)
 - ♻ Other
- Never heat food or drink in plastic containers. This can cause the chemicals in the plastics to be released into food contents.
- Avoid cleaning products that contain biocides (e.g. triclosan in liquid hand soap and spray cleaners) – use eco products that are labelled as being free from harmful chemicals.

