

# TIPS TO AVOID TOXIC CHEMICALS BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER PREGNANCY



**B**abies can be particularly vulnerable to toxic exposures during certain windows of development. Some of these windows occur very early on, before a woman even knows she is pregnant, many occur during pregnancy, and some occur after birth as the child grows. The good news is that mothers who take good care of their health by getting enough sleep, eating healthy, and exercising regularly can boost their bodies' defenses against toxic chemical exposure that can otherwise be hard to control.

Increasingly, research indicates that unnecessary exposures to toxic chemicals in the home may be taking a toll on health of women and babies. Here are some simple tips for avoiding toxic chemicals before, during, and after your pregnancy to help give you and your baby a healthy advantage.

## Make Your Own Cleaning Products

- ▶ It's easy, fun, and cheap to make non-toxic cleaners from safe and effective ingredients like vinegar and baking soda. [Find recipes on the WVE website.](#)

**WHY?** *Certain chemicals in cleaning products have been linked to reduced fertility, birth defects, increased risk of breast cancer, asthma, and hormone disruption. Not to mention the fumes from some cleaners can be overwhelming for a pregnant woman's heightened sense of smell.*

## Avoid Synthetic Fragrance

- ▶ Shop for cleaners, laundry detergents, and personal care products labeled "fragrance-free." Warning: "Unscented" does not always mean fragrance-free!
- ▶ Don't use air fresheners. [Find tips on the WVE website](#) to reduce odors around the home naturally.

**WHY?** *Synthetic fragrance can be made up hundreds of chemicals, which manufacturers are legally allowed to keep secret from consumers. Common fragrance chemicals include phthalates (linked to reproductive and developmental harm) and synthetic musks (potential risks of breast cancer).*

## Some Chemicals of Concern Detected in Pregnant Women's Bodies and/or Breastmilk:

- ▶ Bisphenol-A: receipts, canned foods
- ▶ Flame retardants (PBDEs): furniture, electronics, foam-padded baby products
- ▶ Triclosan: antibacterial cleaners, antibacterial handsoap
- ▶ Benzophenones: sunscreens
- ▶ Pesticides: food, insect repellents, lawn chemicals
- ▶ Phthalates and Synthetic Musks: fragrance, cosmetics, air fresheners, scented cleaners
- ▶ PFOAs: non-stick cookware
- ▶ Parabens: personal care products

## Make Over Your Personal Care

- ▶ Read the label to avoid chemicals like parabens, sodium laureth sulfate, mercury (thimerosal), benzophenones and placenta.
- ▶ Check the Skin Deep database at [cosmeticsdatabase.com](http://cosmeticsdatabase.com) to find safer products or see how yours measure up.
- ▶ Use fewer products, and use them less frequently to reduce exposures.

**WHY?** *Personal care products contain a wide variety of chemicals, including some known to be of concern, and many that lack research to prove safety for women's health. These products are applied directly to our skin where they are easily absorbed into our bodies.*

## Go "BPA-Free"

- ▶ Ditch the canned foods and opt for fresh or frozen fruits and vegetables instead.
- ▶ Look for products packaged in glass or lined cardboard instead of cans.

- ▶ Don't take paper receipts at ATMS, grocery stores, etc. unless you really need them.

**WHY?** [Bisphenol-A \(BPA\)](#) is commonly found in can liners, plastic products and coated on paper receipts. BPA exposure is linked to a host of hormone-related health impacts such as increased risk of cancer, infertility, obesity, and diabetes.

## Turn Down the Heat on Non-Stick Cookware

- ▶ Keep the stove at or below medium heat when using Teflon or non-stick cookware.
- ▶ Cook with cast iron or stainless steel pans when possible.

**WHY?** Teflon can release perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) when heated to 450 degrees. PFOA is linked to developmental harm and cancer.

## Avoid Exposure to Paint

- ▶ Let your partner or a friend paint the nursery.
- ▶ Make sure they use low or no VOC paint.

**WHY?** Paint can contain volatile organic compounds (or VOCs) which have been linked to cancer and respiratory irritation. While it's tempting to help your partner paint the nursery—don't! Even if you use low or no VOC paint it may still contain other chemicals of concern such as heavy metals, or certain preservatives..

## Pass on Pesticides

- ▶ When possible, eat organic food.
- ▶ Check out the Environmental Working Group's [Guide to Pesticides in Produce](#) to find veggies and fruits that are low in pesticides (after all, not everyone can afford to buy organic all the time!)
- ▶ Don't spray pesticides indoors, in the garden, or on pets.
- ▶ Control pests with baits and traps instead of pesticide sprays.

**WHY?** Significant pesticide exposure can disrupt hormones, increase the risk of birth defects and is linked to learning disabilities in young children.



**WOMEN'S VOICES  
FOR THE EARTH**

OUR HEALTH. OUR FUTURE. TOXIC FREE.

## Skip Certain Beauty Services

- ▶ Skip beauty services like Brazilian Blowout (and other hair straightening treatments), hair coloring, and perms, which can release harmful chemicals.
- ▶ Check out WVE's [list of salon ingredients to avoid](#). Ask your stylist not to use products that contain these ingredients.

**WHY?** Some hair and nail salon treatments can contain chemicals like formaldehyde, toluene, phthalates, and other toxics that are linked to birth defects, reproductive problems, and even cancer.

## Minimize Household Dust

- ▶ Take off your shoes inside to avoid tracking in oils and chemicals from the street.
- ▶ Use a door mat to catch dirt at the door.
- ▶ Dust with a micro-fiber cloth or wet cloth and vacuum your house regularly (with a HEPA-filter vacuum if you can).
- ▶ Wash your hands with (triclosan-free) soap and water regularly throughout the day, especially before you eat.

**WHY?** Shoes can track in toxic chemicals like lawn pesticides, coal tar from a driveway, etc. Leaving shoes at the door can dramatically lower contaminants found in household dust. Dust can also carry harmful chemicals that shed off of household furniture, electronics, and other household products.

## Help Change the World

- ▶ Join the Women's Voices for the Earth community and [sign up today](#) for our email action alert list to hold corporations and the government accountable for the toxic chemicals that harm our health and communities.
- ▶ Throw a Green Momma Party with our [Green Momma Party Guide](#), a how-to for detoxing your home in preparation for baby. Included in the guide are some inexpensive, DIY recipes to try out with friends!
- ▶ Find us on [Facebook](#), and follow us on [Twitter](#) and [Pinterest](#) for more helpful tips and ideas.

114 W. Pine Street, P.O. Box 8743, Missoula, MT 59807

Phone: 406/543-3747

[www.womensvoices.org](http://www.womensvoices.org)

[womensvoices@womensvoices.org](mailto:womensvoices@womensvoices.org)