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.

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 because we know that it has 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.

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**DISCLAIMER:** This leaflet is for information purposes only and does not constitute medical advice. It is intended to help women who are pregnant or planning pregnancy to reduce their exposure to certain harmful chemicals. It in no way claims to be a comprehensive treatment of the subject of all chemicals associated with breast cancers and should not be used as an alternative to professional care. Breast Cancer UK has used all reasonable endeavours to ensure that the content of this leaflet is correct at the time of publishing, but no warranty is given to that effect nor any liability accepted for any loss or damage arising from the use of this leaflet.

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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.
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, products available which do not contain 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.

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.

Bathroom

You’re pregnant – time for some pampering before your little one arrives – 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).

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:

- **Avoid** changing printer cartridges or photocopier toner: if you need to, wear disposable gloves.
- **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.

- **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)
  - Polyethylene (PPE)
  - 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.

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 workplace. 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.

**Remember these simple rules:**

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