

The Heavy Burden of Household Toxins

Learn how to stop bringing toxins into your home and to help your body detoxify



Part III in Dr. Merritt's Environmental Health and Medicine Series

By Dorothy Merritt, MD

Most of us understand the obvious, that certain household products like pesticides, cleaning products and automotive supplies contain harmful ingredients that we should stay away from.

But many are surprised to learn that most of our toxic load comes from the products we use everyday in our homes. Everything from furniture and electronics to body lotions and laundry detergents contain toxins that have been linked to just about every known disease. Recent medical and scientific studies show disturbing correlations between chronic low-level exposure to these common chemical substances and allergies, asthma, autoimmune disease, birth defects, cardiovascular disease, developmental delays, cancer, and a host of other problems.

Because we are unable to feel, see, smell, or taste many household toxins at first contact, it is important to be aware of those most widely-used and to proactively take measures to prevent or reduce our exposure to them. These substances are persistent and bioaccumulative. They are stored in our fatty tissue and accumulate over time because our bodies can't get rid of them. Residues of more than 400 toxic chemicals have been found in human blood, urine and tissues, many of them at levels shown to cause disease in animals.

Fortunately, we can minimize these toxins through education and common sense. We must learn how to stop bringing toxins into our homes and to help our bodies detoxify.

The Chemical Culprits

Currently there are over 24,000 synthetic chemicals in the products we use daily. They are in the air we breathe, foods we

eat, and readily absorbed through our skin. Here are just a few common ones:

BISPHENOL (BPA) is a chemical used in plastic production and is commonly found in water bottles, baby bottles, plastic wraps, and food packaging. The government's National Toxicology Program has concluded that there is some concern about brain and behavioral effects on fetuses and young children at current exposure levels. BPA has been associated with increased risk for cardiovascular disease, miscarriages, breast and prostate cancer, and reproductive dysfunction.

BUTYLATED HYDROXYANISOLE (BHA) is an additive that preserves fats and oils in food and cosmetics. It is found in chewing gum, baked goods and processed foods, and food packaging. BHA has caused cancer in test animals and in test tube studies it mimics the hormonal actions of estrogen. Like many other chemical food additives, BHA does not work in sync with our organs and it does have the ability to disrupt normal bodily functions.

OXYBENZONE is a chemical used in sunscreens, cosmetics, and moisturizers. It has been linked to hormone disruption. About 97 percent of Americans have this compound in their urine, but current exposure levels have been deemed safe. The Skin Care Foundation acknowledges some concerns, but notes that research on oxybenzone is limited.

PARABENS are synthetic preservatives found in moisturizers and hair care and shaving products. The FDA has deemed current levels safe, but studies show that parabens cause hormone disruptions and cancer in animals. A study published in 2004 (*Journal of Applied Toxicology*) detected parabens in breast tumors.

PERFLUOROCTANOIC ACID (PFOA) is a component of Teflon nonstick coatings found in nonstick pots and pans and tap water. Exposure has been shown to cause birth or developmental effects, hormone disruption and reproductive abnormalities in animal and human studies. A study published in the *Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine* found that children and teenagers with PFOA in their blood serum had higher total cholesterol levels and higher levels of LDL, the “bad” cholesterol.

PERCHLOROETHYLENE (PERC) is used in 80 percent of the drycleaners in the U.S. and listed as “reasonably anticipated to be a human carcinogen” in the Twelfth Report on Carcinogens published by the National Toxicology Program. Long-term exposure can cause leukemia and other cancers. Short-term exposure can cause central nervous system symptoms such as dizziness, headache, and sleepiness.

PHTHALATES are industrial chemicals that soften plastic. They are found in household items like toys, shower curtains, vinyl flooring, detergents, food packaging, and even shampoos and air fresheners. Animal studies show reduced sperm counts and reproductive abnormalities with evidence of a link to liver cancer in humans. In 2008, Congress passed legislation to ban six phthalates from toys and cosmetics.

Read Labels, Choose Wisely

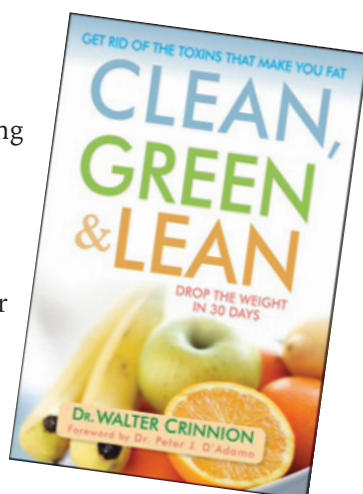
Armed with knowledge about dangers of toxic chemicals, consumers can choose alternative products and demand safer alternatives from manufacturers. Here are some simple steps to reduce your exposure:

- Check the ingredients on every product and choose more natural, less chemical ingredients.
- BHA is hard to avoid in processed foods, so choose fresh, natural and unrefined foods.
- PFOA-free pots and pans are available for purchase. The EPA is urging makers to stop using PFOA by 2015.
- Filter all drinking water.
- Switch to glass products and choose plastic products labeled “BPA-Free.”

Detox Your Body

There are many ways to “detox” your body and help support your body’s natural processes in ridding itself of these toxins. One great source to read is *Clean, Green & Lean*, by Walter Crinnion, ND. It provides a step-by-step guide to removing the toxicants from your home, your food and your body.

Another easy way to detox the fat bound chemicals that are already present in your body is to eat an ounce of fat-free, olestra containing potato chips per day for two years. In biopsy-proven studies of fat, this worked to



RESOURCES FOR LOWERING YOUR TOXIC LOAD —

- **ENVIRONMENTAL WORKING GROUP:** nonprofit organization that provides information on toxic ingredients in consumer products
- **GREEN GUIDE:** provides consumer resources on choosing everyday products made of environmentally preferable materials
- **HEALTHYSTUFF.ORG:** tests over 5000 consumer products for toxic ingredients and provides results in a searchable database, with a focus on children’s products.
- **POLLUTION IN PEOPLE:** provides tips on choosing less-toxic consumer products in nine categories.
- **WASHINGTON TOXICS COALITION:** nonprofit that provides information on safer alternatives to toxic chemicals in consumer products and advocates for state policies that protect environmental health as part of the national Safer States network.

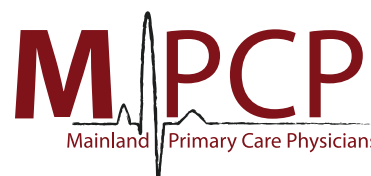
rid the fat bound toxins that are normally reabsorbed at 99 percent as they travel through the gut.

In other studies, where toxins were measured after eating this amount of olestra, the stool contained 3000 percent more toxins than in those who did not eat olestra. I recommend that my patients eat them for two years and incorporate more natural foods during that time so that new toxins do not build up.

The methylation pathways are also very important for the natural release of toxins from the body and it is important to support these with methylfolate, methyl B12 and N acetyl cysteine (in most patients), in various combinations.

Daily exercise, whole grains and wholesome fresh foods (especially organic and locally grown varieties), massage therapy and other healthy lifestyle choices can certainly help to keep your body and your immune system functioning at a higher level.

With just a bit of extra attention and effort, you can lighten your toxic burden and give your body more of what it needs to keep you feeling strong and energized. ☘



LEARN MORE ABOUT THE TOXINS AFFECTING YOUR HEALTH. CALL FOR YOUR CONSULTATION TODAY!

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