

[IMAGE]

Beware of the Chemicals in Your Home

By Julie T. Chen, MD

When we were children, our parents used to warn us about all the dangers out in the world. Little did we know back then that there are dangers aplenty right in our own homes...and usually underneath our sinks or in our cupboards.

Most of us are used to getting our chemical cleaning products from our local stores and not until recent years, most people hadn't been too diligent about reading the ingredients on these product labels. Even for those of us who are fastidious about reading our food labels, that same level of caution and attention to detail is less often applied towards the products we keep around our house for cleaning purposes.

As we learn more and more about the chemicals we surround ourselves with in our homes and in our skincare even, we know that perhaps more attention is necessary for reading those labels as well...because even topical encounters with these, over time, can have cumulative effects. Isn't that why some of our medications come in topical forms for absorption as well?

Some of the common names to watch out for in cleaning agents and even in our skincare creams include but are not limited to phthalates, styrene, alkylphenol ethoxylates, formaldehyde, organochlorines like DDT, and volatile organic compounds like butane, propane, and ethanol. Each of these scientific sounding chemicals seem like just simple compounds we may have heard off in chemistry class in school, but the very real life effects may not be so benign.

Many of these disrupt our organ function and is a neurotoxin and may potentially cause hormonal issues as well. So, in a world where cleaning agents abound in every household, what can we do to protect ourselves?

Thankfully, with growing concern about the potential negative long term effects from such chemicals, there are now more organic options in most of our grocery stores and convenience stores. There is the option of looking for products that do not contain names of ingredients you have a hard time pronouncing and seem to be coming from nature. So, the easiest way is to first start reading the labels of the products you purchase to see if you want those ingredients around you and in your home.

Second, you may want to consider using some common household agents for cleaning that are a bit more benign to the human body including vinegar, castile soap, baking soda, or essential oils from plants. Although it is beyond the scope of this article to talk about all the various options and the how-to's of making various cleaners, consider the internet as a very informative option to start doing your research. Once you have compiled some options, you may find it helpful to speak to your naturopath or integrative physician about the various ingredients of making your own household cleaners. You may be surprised at how some plant-based essential oils can have some anti-bacterial, anti-viral activity.

Finally, consider the cooking ware in your home as well for a source of potential toxins in your home. Be wary of using plastic and old cooking ware. Check with your physician about which ones may be harmful and which ones are fine. If you are concerned about heavy metal exposure, ask your physician for a blood and urine test for screening of levels especially if you are having health issues like neuropathy (nerve disease), just to give an example.

While our parents were right in the fact that there seems to be far more dangers outside than in our homes, if you are now a parent yourself, making the extra effort of creating a non-chemical environment at home will likely benefit the health of your children as well as yourself.

I encourage you to read your product labels as fastidiously as your food labels and just like with your favorite healthy food products, once you find the ones you love that are organic and safe (or once you are used to making your own), all the hard work will have been done and you can just sit back and reap the benefits of surrounding yourself with a fortress of safety...that is super clean as well!

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