10 Dangerous Everyday Things in Your Home

Posted By Dr. Mercola | December 23 2008

Household consumer products injure 33.1 million people in the United States every year. These incidents cost $800 billion in related expenses from death, injury or property damages. And many scientists are starting to believe that, in particular, the chemicals found in a wide variety of the goods you use every day may be more toxic than previously thought. Here are 10 of the most common products that may be hazardous to your health:

10. Mothballs

Since moths chew holes through clothing and other textiles, people pack away these stinky repellents to kill them. But studies on one active ingredient in some repellents, **paradichlorobenzene**, found that it can cause cancer in animals. Other types of moth balls use **naphthalene**, which after prolonged exposure can damage or destroy red blood cells, and which can also stimulate nausea, vomiting and diarrhea.

9. Pesticides

Ninety percent of households in the United States use some form of pesticide, a broad term that encompasses a variety of chemical formulas that kill everything from tiny microorganisms up to rodents. In 2006, the American Association of Poison Control Centers received nearly 46,000 calls regarding children under 5 years old who had been exposed to potentially toxic levels of pesticides.

8. Pressed Wood Products

This faux wood takes bits and pieces of logs and wood leftovers and combines them together. Pressed wood products include paneling, particle board, fiberboard and insulation, all of which were particularly popular for home construction in the 1970's. However, the glue that holds the wood particles in place may use **urea-formaldehyde** as a resin. The U.S. EPA estimates that this is the largest source of formaldehyde emissions indoors. Formaldehyde exposure can set off watery eyes, burning eyes and throat, difficulty breathing and asthma attacks. Scientists also know that it can cause cancer in animals. The risk is greater with older pressed wood products, since newer ones are better regulated.

7. Chemicals in Carpets

Indoor carpeting has recently come under greater scrutiny because of the **volatile organic compounds** (VOCs) associated with new carpet installation. The glue and dyes used with carpeting are known to emit VOCs, which can be harmful to your health in high concentrations. However, the initial VOC emissions will often subside after the first few days following.

6. Laser Printers Chemicals

A 2007 study found that some laser printers give off ultra fine particles that can cause serious health problems. Another study confirmed that laser and ink-jet printers can release **volatile organic compounds** (VOCs) and **ozone particulates**. All of these have been linked with heart and lung disease.

5. Lead Paint

In 1991, the U.S. government declared lead to be the greatest environmental threat to children. Even low concentrations can cause problems with your central nervous system, brain, blood cells and kidneys. It's particularly threatening for fetuses, babies and children, because of potential developmental disorders. Many houses built before 1978 contain lead paint. Once the paint begins to peel away will, it release the harmful lead particles that you can inhale.

4. Air Fresheners and Cleaning Solutions

Air fresheners and cleaning solutions, when used excessively or in a small, unventilated area, can release toxic levels of pollutants. This comes from two main chemicals called **ethylene-based glycol ethers** and **terpenes**. While the EPA regards the ethers as toxic by themselves, the non-toxic terpenes can react with ozone in the air to form a poisonous combination. Air fresheners in particular are linked to many volatile organic compounds, such as nitrogen dioxide, and some fresheners also contain **paradichlorobenzene**, the same chemical emitted by mothballs.

3. Baby Bottles and BPA

Canada has taken the first steps to outlaw the sale of baby bottles made from **polycarbonate plastics**, which are the most common type on the market. It has done so because the plastics are made with a chemical called **bisphenol-a** (**BPA**). BPA has a structure very similar to estrogen and for that reason is referred to as a "hormone disruptor." Hormone disruptors can interfere with the natural human hormones, especially for young children.

2. Flame Retardants

Commonly used in mattresses, upholstery, television and computer casings and circuit boards, flame retardants use **polybrominated diphenyl ethers**, or **PBDEs** for short. Two forms of PBDEs were phased out of use in manufacturing in the United States in 2004 because of related health threats, but the products containing them linger on. Studies have linked PBDEs to learning and memory problems, lowered sperm counts and poor thyroid functioning in rats and mice. Other animal studies have indicated that PBDEs could be carcinogenic in humans, although that has not yet been confirmed.

1. Cosmetic Phthalates

Phthalates, also called **plasticizers**, go into many products including hair spray, shampoos, fragrances, and deodorants. Phthalates bind the color and fragrance in cosmetic products, and are also used to increase the durability and flexibility of plastics. Like BPA, these hormone-like chemicals are linked to reproductive and developmental problems in animals. Because of these findings, California and Washington state have banned the use of phthalates in toys for younger children.

Sources:

» How Stuff Works

Even if you carefully monitor what you eat, and pay close attention to the household products and items you purchase, your chance of being exposed to hazardous toxins is *still* quite high. Lead, arsenic, mercury, PCBs, flame retardants, and an array of other chemicals linked to cancer, birth defects and neurological diseases are well represented in most people's bloodstream.

These dangerous chemicals and toxins are in the air you breathe, the water you drink, the food you eat and the products you use. Over the last 50 years, from 70,000 to 100,000 different chemicals have been introduced into the world's markets with about 1,500 new ones added each year.

Only now are governments beginning to examine the dangers posed to human health and world ecosystems.

Many western governments are finally initiating new chemical controls as part of the 2006 Strategic Approach to International Chemical Management agreement. Leading the way is the European Union, with a new program called REACH (Regulation on Registration, Evaluation, Authorization and Restriction of Chemicals) that requires industry to prove the safety of their chemicals and consumer products *before* they reach the market.

But with the sheer number of toxic chemicals on the market already – all without any major oversight or testing for safety until after the fact – it's no wonder you're not as healthy as you could be.

More Toxic Sources You May Not Have Considered

Although cutting your exposure to toxic materials down to zero would be a near impossible task, I believe you can significantly lower, and maintain your toxic load as low as possible, by being an informed and vigilant consumer.

Unfortunately, many of the toxins that you're exposed to are from your general environment, which you may have little or no control over. However, you can still make a positive impact on your health by *avoiding some of the products* that are infamously high in various toxins, and replacing them with healthier alternatives, such as:

Farm-raised salmon – High in PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls). This industrial chemical has been banned in the United States for decades, yet is a persistent organic pollutant that"s still present in your environment. Its risks include cancer and impaired fetal brain development. Unfortunately, most farm-raised salmon, which accounts for most of the supply in the United States, are fed meals of ground-up fish that have absorbed PCBs in the environment, and for this reason should be avoided, especially if you are pregnant or nursing.

Commercial animal fats – High in dioxins. Dioxins are chemical compounds formed as a result of combustion processes such as commercial or municipal waste incineration and from burning fuels (like wood, coal or oil). These highly toxic compounds pollute our environment where they enter the food chain. Over 95 percent of your exposure to dioxins comes from eating commercial animal

fats. Health risks include: cancer, reproductive and developmental disorders, skin rashes, skin discoloration, excessive body hair, mild liver damage. Grass-fed, organic meats are your healthiest option all around.

Tap water – High in disinfection byproducts (DBPs), chloroform, and fluoride. Chloroform and other DBPs are formed when chlorine is added to water. This is the most common form of water disinfection in the U.S. Unfortunately, chloroform can cause cancer, potential reproductive damage, birth defects, dizziness, fatigue, headache, liver and kidney damage.

Another byproduct of water chlorination is trihalomethanes (THMs), which are Cancer Group B carcinogens, meaning they've been shown to cause cancer in laboratory animals. They've also been linked to reproductive problems in both animals and humans.

Fluoride is another serious danger silently lurking in most people's tap water. Fluoride alters your endocrine function, especially in your thyroid, increases your risk of bone fractures, and can lower IQ.

Filtering the water in your home (including the water in your shower) with a reverse osmosis filter is your best option here.

Non-Stick Cookware. More evidence has emerged regarding the dangers of Perflurooctanoic Acid (PFOA), which is used in the production of non-stick cookware and stain-resistant snack food packaging. PFOA is currently found in the bloodstream of 95 percent of American men, women, and children. PFOA has already been implicated in increased instances of cancer in the pancreas, liver, testicles, and mammary glands, as well as miscarriages, thyroid problems, weakened immune systems, and low organ weights.

A growing community of scientists believe the largest concentration of PFOA comes from the telomers used to make the stain and grease repellent coatings for fast food containers, apparel, and carpeting.

Mattresses – High in PBDEs, antimony, and formaldehyde. PBDEs, which have been banned in Canada, Europe and several states, build up in your body over time, and what you absorb or inhale does not go away. This is of great concern, since you spend as much as a third of your life in bed, on a potentially toxic mattress!

The health problems associated with PBDE exposure include brain and reproductive damage, decreased sperm quality, thyroid problems and even cancer at high levels. Boric acid, another agent found in many mattresses, is a toxic respiratory irritant used to kill roaches. Antimony, a metal that may be more toxic than mercury, and formaldehyde, which causes cancer, are both used in mattresses for flame retardant purposes.

A person sleeping on a chemically treated mattress will absorb 0.8 mg of antimony every night; an amount that is 27 times more than the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency says is safe. Five-year-old children, meanwhile, will absorb 0.5 mg of antimony every night, according to CPSC, which is 63 times more than the EPA's safety limit.

Shopping for a safe mattress is not an easy task. Mattress manufacturers are not required to label or disclose which chemicals their mattresses contain. However, there are now a few manufacturers that make 100% wool, toxin-free mattresses. Another option that seems reliable is finding a mattress that uses a Kevlar, bullet-proof type of material in lieu of chemicals for fire-proofing. These are available in most big stores, and will help you to avoid some of the toxicity.

I recently purchased a Stearns and Foster mattress that has Kevlar fibers woven into the mattress covering. I am very happy with this mattress; it's FAR more comfortable than a number of the organic mattresses I had purchased in the past.

Clothing – May contain formaldehyde. Clothing made of rayon, blended cotton, corduroy, wrinkle-resistant 100% cotton, and any synthetic blended polymer are likely to have been treated with formaldehyde resins, which is a "probable carcinogen." You can be exposed to the chemical both via off-gassing and direct contact with your skin. As illustrated by recent lawsuits against lingerie giant Victoria's Secret, undergarments containing formaldehyde can create nagging health problems.

Formaldehyde has been shown to cause cancer in animals, and may cause cancer in humans. Other common adverse health effects include fatigue, skin rashes, and allergic reactions.

Is There Hope?

I realize it can get quite overwhelming, but as I stated earlier, I believe you CAN limit your exposure, and hence your risk of suffering any debilitating effects.

So, instead of feeling overtaken by the enormity and the pervasiveness of the problem, please **focus on the things that you can control** right now. That would include switching to non-toxic and natural alternatives for things that you use on your body, in your home and around your yard, to start.