

# Protect your baby's health

## Reduce your exposure to harmful chemicals in the home

### Top tips

- 1 Eat a healthy diet, rich in organic fruit and vegetables and limit processed and canned food.
- 2 Store food and water in glass or stainless steel containers.
- 3 Check the ingredients of cosmetics, baby care and cleaning products for EDCs. Use the Yuka app to scan products for harmful chemicals.
- 4 Avoid exposure to garden and household pesticides, solvents and synthetic sprays.
- 5 Dust and vacuum your house regularly. Keep rooms well-ventilated.

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. Scan our QR code for our Chemical guide for more tips on how to reduce your exposure to harmful chemicals.



Remember these simple rules:

**Reduce** how much you use

**Replace** with natural alternatives

**Research** before you buy

### Garage and garden

Gardening is a good way to keep active during pregnancy. These tips will help you stay safe and protect your baby while enjoying some outdoor time:

- 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 when using organic sprays.
- Remove garden pests by hand and if you can, pull out weeds by hand. Alternatively, get your other half or bestic 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.
- Use sunscreen that contains mineral filters. Avoid chemical UV filters.



### Bathroom

You're pregnant – time for some pampering before your little ones arrive. But choose your products carefully:

- Minimise use of beauty products and cosmetics.
- Avoid hair dyes, especially those that contain para-phenylenediamine (PPD), nonylphenol, resorcinol or ammonia.
- Avoid cosmetics that contain parabens, phthalates, fragrances (parfum), deodorants/antiperspirants

with aluminium, and toothpaste and soaps that contain triclosan.

- Avoid using wet wipes, especially those that contain synthetic fragrances.



### Living 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 fresh flowers or bowls of herbs such as rosemary and sage to add a pleasant fragrance to rooms.

- Avoid using fly sprays and flea powder. If you can't avoid using them, make sure you wear gloves and a mask, or if possible, ask someone else to apply them.

- Avoid flame- and stain-resistant fabrics. Choose natural materials where possible.



### 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 work from home:

- Avoid changing printer cartridges or photocopier cartridges: 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.



### Baby's room

It's natural to 'feather the nest' and decorate rooms before your new arrival. If you do, here are some tips:

- Use water-based paints and choose products marked 'Low VOC'.
- When decorating, always ensure adequate ventilation and wear protective gloves and mask.
- Avoid removing old paint: it may contain lead.
- Try natural products such as wood, cork or ceramic tiles

and organic products which contain fewer harmful chemicals.

- Avoid buying plywood furniture as it may emit formaldehyde, and air all newly-bought furniture.
- Wash new clothes and linen before first use. Source organic cotton if possible: it's likely to contain fewer harmful chemicals.
- Choose wooden toys, rather than plastic toys.



### Kitchen

You (and your baby) are what you eat – so it's important to try and reduce your intake of potentially harmful chemicals from food and drink:

- Eat fresh, preferably organic fruit and vegetables.
- Wash fresh food thoroughly to remove pesticide residues.
- Eat less processed and canned food.
- Avoid storing food in plastic containers or cling film. Use glass, ceramic or stainless steel for storing food and drinks.

- Avoid heating food or drink in plastic containers. This may cause the chemicals in the plastics to be released into your food.
- Avoid cleaning products that contain triclosan – use eco products that are labelled as being free from harmful chemicals.
- Use cast iron, stainless steel or glass cookware when cooking and baking. Avoid non-stick pans and trays.



**breast cancer uk.**  
Prevention saves lives

Visit our website for more tips on how you can reduce your exposure to harmful chemicals.

Start your breast cancer prevention journey by taking our Prevention Quiz. Scan the QR code:



## Growing concern about exposure to harmful chemicals

During pregnancy we avoid alcohol and smoking because we know that they have been linked to developmental problems in children.

Exposure to other harmful chemicals, known as Endocrine Disrupting Chemicals or EDCs, either before or after birth, may also be linked to health problems.

Exposure to EDCs, through the placenta in the unborn baby, may increase the risk of several diseases, including breast cancer.



Scan our QR code to read our life stages resource.

## Which chemicals are considered potentially harmful?

**Carcinogens** – cause cancer by directly damaging our DNA or by disrupting our cells metabolic processes. Cancerous cells divide in an uncontrolled manner and may spread 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.

Potentially harmful chemicals can be found in a range of everyday products including food, cosmetics, hair products, furniture and fabrics, cleaning products, packaging, cookware, toys and baby care products.

### EDCs and breast cancer

The female hormone oestrogen is important for reproductive development and pregnancy. However, high levels of oestrogen are associated with an increased risk of breast cancer. Certain EDCs that act in a similar way to natural oestrogen may also increase breast cancer risk.

## How do harmful chemicals enter the body?

Over time, products may release harmful chemicals. These chemicals may be inhaled as we breathe, absorbed through our skin or ingested through our food and drink.





## 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 and smoking.

But did you know that your exposure 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.



### REFERENCES

For a complete list of references used to make this guide please visit our life stages resource:  
([www.breastcanceruk.org.uk/reduce-your-risk/life-stages/](http://www.breastcanceruk.org.uk/reduce-your-risk/life-stages/))

### DISCLAIMER

This information has been written for members of the public to help them understand more about how and why certain chemicals may be linked to a potential increased risk of breast cancer.

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Breast Cancer UK works to tackle the environmental  
and chemical causes of breast cancer.

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Prevention saves lives

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