

## Archives

# Toxins in Our Personal Environment

WELLNESS)

**By Jeff Davidson**

No matter how healthy you strive to be you still have to be on guard against toxins that are commonly found in our environment. Annually, 13+ million tons of sulfur dioxide is emitted into our atmosphere, primarily by electric utilities that burn fossil fuels.

In the Air, All Around Us Sulfur dioxide has been directly linked to acid rain, forest and crop damage, and damage to the health and life cycle of aquatic life in lakes and streams. Sulfur dioxide poses health problems for individuals with heart conditions and asthma.



Toxins

Lead in the atmosphere is now attributed to metal processing plants. Airborne lead particles have been known to exacerbate high blood pressure problems, anemia, and even heart disease. Lead can also do damage to the brain, nerves, kidneys, and liver. Exposure to lead has been linked to behavioral disorders, memory loss, emotional disorders, and seizures.

Other airborne menaces that impact us include bisphenola (BPA), mercury, and pesticides. BPA is used in various types of plastics, and has been linked to ill effects on the brain, behavior, the male prostate gland, young children, and developing fetuses. Avoid BPA-laced products by employing glass or BPA-free plastics

instead. Plastics that made with BPA are indicated by the letters "PC" or the number 7 near the recycle symbol.

The level of mercury that humans absorb by eating fish and shellfish is less of a concern as one ages. Young children or fetuses, however, can sustain brain damage or nerve damage. Women who are pregnant or nursing, as well as young children, are strongly advised to avoid consuming fish high in mercury.

The Persistence of Pesticides Much of it comes from the agricultural pesticides found in food and soil, household cleaning products, and insect and pest treatments. Low-level exposure to pesticides can be irritating but not dangerous. High-level exposure to pesticides can bring on nausea, weakness, dizziness, headaches, muscle twitching, and tingling sensations.

Pesticides can contribute to damage to the central nervous system and the liver. Within the

home, use of products containing pesticides directly contributes to an increased risk of birth defects, brain tumors, and acute lymphoblastic leukemia.

Indoors is No Haven In homes, schools, workplaces, shopping malls, and even churches, too often we're unaware that particulate matter such as mold, mildew, paint fumes, pesticides, pet dander, smoke, and microorganisms are mixed into the air. Indoors or out, when we breathe air that has a low oxygen count because it's polluted with fumes, carcinogens, or microorganisms, in small ways we suffocate. Unclean air supplies us with oxygen levels insufficient for our bodies to optimally perform everyday tasks. As more toxins enter the bloodstream, and ultimately the colon, eliminating them becomes increasingly difficult.

What we can do to reduce the level of toxins in our homes? Smoking is absolutely verboten. Tobacco smoke contains a mixture of 4,700+ compounds. Secondhand smoke is a dangerous health hazard. Inhaling cigarette smoke, first or secondhand, is especially toxic to children, who face the danger of incurring damage to their developing organs.

***Move Over, Rover***—Dead skin cells from animals, commonly known as pet dander, slough off when an animal's skin becomes dry. The largest concentrations are found where the animal sleeps. When small concentrations of pet dander become airborne, they can be swallowed or inhaled without realizing it. As many as three in ten people with allergies own pets.

***Attack of the Microorganisms***—Beyond animal dander, bacteria, dust mites, viruses, mold and mildew, commonly found indoors, can build up in your body to the point of toxicity. The elderly, children, and individuals with weaknesses in their immune systems are particularly susceptible.

Inhaling large quantities of mold can lead to respiratory ailments, as well as nausea and diarrhea. Mildew is merely mold found in damp areas, which include the bathroom, kitchen, or a wet basement. The spores from mildew are toxic and unsightly. Scrubbing them requires diligence, as part of the spores become airborne, and thus your chance of inhaling them increases. Wearing a surgeon's mask while cleaning is not a bad idea!

Paint fumes pose an indoor health challenge. Some paints harbor volatile organic compounds (VOC), which are toxic if inhaled. Large buildups of VOC can lead to the intake of toxins that cause damage to the liver, headaches, decreased coordination, and other issues. Avoid paints that include VOCs, or if you employ them, ensure that you paint in a highly ventilated area.

Other common products such as varnishes, paint thinners, lacquers, enamels, stains, watercolors, and latex, also emit toxic fumes that are best avoided.

***Home on the Range***—When a gas stove exhibits a continual yellow flame, it's an indication that it could be adjusted improperly. Call your gas company to adjust your stove burners. You want brilliant blue flame tips. When buying a new stove or gas range, seek those that don't include a pilot light.

Ill-vented gas ranges can produce nitrogen dioxide and lead to respiratory problems, so, when shopping for a new stove, go electric. With wood stoves you want doors that fit snugly. Burn wood that is completely dry, cured, and/or aged woods. Avoid burning pressure-treated wood, as it is laced with chemicals. Improperly vented or ill-maintained wood stoves can give off toxic particulates, carbon monoxide, nitrogen, or hydrocarbons.

***Make it Safe for Santa***—If you have a chimney, have it inspected annually. The chimney itself, the flue, and furnaces are collecting places for carbon monoxide. Even if you don't use the chimney, you may have acquired toxins from earlier owners.

***The Pain in the Drain***—Biological contaminants can build up wherever there is stagnant water in your home. This includes drain cans, ducts, humidifiers, and in and around insulation, ceiling tiles, and carpet. Viruses, molds, and bacteria breed in stagnant water.

Toxic microorganisms are routinely found in homes' heating and cooling systems, and in humidifiers. Keeping such containers and surfaces clean with non-toxic agents such as white vinegar keeps biological contaminants in check.

***Sick Building, Sick Home***—Poor ventilation can plague homes as it plagues buildings.

If molds or bacteria are suspected, remove or replace items in your home that have sustained water damage, particularly carpets. Replace them with tile or hardwood floors. Sofas, love seats, and padded chairs with covers that can be removed, washed, and reinstalled are best. Venetian blinds and other blinds that can be cleaned with non-toxic disinfectants are preferable to drapes, which become depositories of dust, mold, and other carcinogens. Also, It's not a bad idea to have some kind of air filter in rooms throughout the house, especially bedrooms.

***Clean and Green?***—Odds are that under kitchen and bathroom sinks you store harmful products. What can you do to protect yourself? Avoid products with a danger or warning label. Use rubber gloves whenever working with such products. Also, avoid products that include fragrances. There's no reason that your home should smell sweet [*see accompanying article, Personal Care Products on page 20*].

You can concoct your own homemade, natural cleaning solutions from baking soda, lemon juice, washing soda, and vinegar. Or, patronize cleaning products that display the Green Seal logo, which certifies that the product is safe for both human health and the environment. If you retain a cleaning service, seek one that is Green Clean certified. Ask what types of products they use. Check out the list of acceptable cleaning products at [greennetworkers.com](http://greennetworkers.com).

Food for Thought Toxins in our food supply are particularly onerous. 45% of high fructose corn syrup contains mercury.

Produce that you buy could be laced with pesticides. So, go organic. Organic food is more expensive on a day-to-day basis, but avoiding serious illness is the ultimate long run cost-saver. Potatoes, apples, and other thin skinned fruits and vegetables are high risk for pesticide contamination.

The fresh foods are always best. Frozen comes in second. Avoid anything that's been on the shelf too long or preserved by packaging. Choose products that come in boxes or glass, rather than cans.

It takes time and a certain level of awareness, but you can reduce the level of toxins in your immediate environment. Your health and the health of those around you depends on your ability to take charge in this critical area.

*Jeff Davidson is "The Work-Life Balance Expert®," has written 59 books, is an authority on time management, and is a professional speaker. He the author of "Breathing Space," and "Simpler Living." His 60 Second Series with Adams Media are popular titles worldwide. For more information visit [BreathingSpace.com](http://BreathingSpace.com) and through 24 iPhone Apps at [itunes.com/apps/BreathingSpaceInstitute](http://itunes.com/apps/BreathingSpaceInstitute).*