

GO GREEN TO CLEAN

In keeping our homes clean, spotless and germ-free, we may be doing more harm to our health than we think.

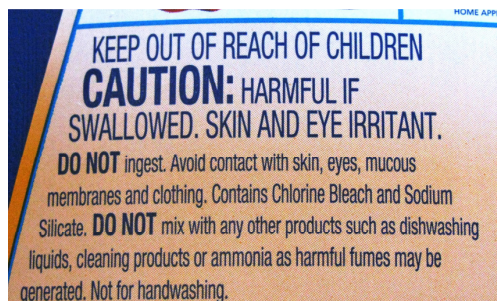
Most of us believe anything sold as a consumer product is safe under normal conditions.



But many household products are very harsh and, in terms of disposal, are actually classified as hazardous waste. The air in our home is filled with fumes from petrochemical solvents added to cleaning products to dissolve dirt; most cleaning products contain formaldehyde; and many contain caustic acids, and other toxic chemicals.

Food manufacturers must provide the complete list of product ingredients. Cleaning product manufacturers don't.

Product warning labels are usually the only guide about product toxicity you have while you are in the store. These labels emphasize the danger of product poisoning through ingestion or direct contact rather than everyday exposure through residue in the air or on surfaces like counters, floors and rugs. (And think how much closer infants, toddlers and pets are to floors and rugs.)



These toxic chemicals affect everyone but especially **babies**, causing exzema and eye and airway irritation, as their immune system isn't fully developed. And, ironically, many experts believe that keeping your house too clean increases the long-term risk of allergies because the baby's immune system becomes hypersensitive and then overreacts to harmless allergens.



Seniors are also more prone to problems because their immune systems may be comprised by aging and the effects of chronic conditions like diabetes, vascular disease and others.

Also, people like our **personal support workers** (PSWs), who work with these products on a regular basis, are also at risk of being affected. This can range from mild to significant discomfort, and even becoming hyper-sensitive to these chemicals.



Toilet cleaners usually contain hydrochloric acid which is very corrosive. When inhaled it can irritate the eyes, lung and nose.

Or take Pine-Sol ...



THE POWERFUL SCENT OF CLEAN.

Many of our PSWs find Pine-Sol all too powerful, and physically irritating.

The good news is ...

There are many commercial “green” cleaning products available now, like Seventh Generation, Biokleen, Simply Clean, GreenWorks, and Eco Concepts.

And there are product labelling programs that help you identify green products. The EcoLogo Program was established by Environment Canada in 1988 to help Canadians make informed purchases of environmentally-friendly products and services.



The EcoLogo website www.ecologo.org provides a list of products from bathroom cleaners to varnishes that have been certified as environmentally-preferable.

Sometimes people think that green products are more expensive, but they may actually be cheaper.

Many green cleaning products are sold in concentrated form and so you use less at a time.

(This is something to consider even with products that aren't green. Diluting these substances can make them last longer and reduce the toxicity of the amount used each time.)

But the cheapest and most friendly cleaning materials (for people, pets and the environment) are probably right at home now: white vinegar, baking soda, lemon juice, olive or other natural oils, castile soap, and so on.

The two real workhorses of natural cleaning are **white vinegar and baking soda**.

In fact, white vinegar is almost the only cleaner you need. Here are just a few examples (using undiluted vinegar unless otherwise specified).

Use vinegar to clean all kitchen surfaces (counters, refrigerators, stovetops). Prevent bathroom mildew buildup by washing shower tiles with vinegar. Just take a bowl of white vinegar, soak a sponge in the vinegar and then sprinkle some salt on the sponge, scrub and rinse. Between cleanings, you can spray wet tiles with a 50/50 mix of vinegar and water. Remove soap build-up from faucets by using a paste made of 1 part salt to 4 parts vinegar. Remove corrosion or chemical build-up from showerheads by soaking in vinegar overnight. To clean windows, spray with a 50/50 mix of vinegar and water and wipe clean with newspapers or a cloth. To clean no-wax floors, use a solution of 250 ml (1 cup) of vinegar in 4 litres (1 gal) of water. If you want, add 6-12 drops of peppermint oil as a freshener.

Baking soda is a multi-purpose cleaner like white vinegar, and it's a terrific deodorizer. A box or small bowl of baking soda in the refrigerator or any cupboard will keep unpleasant odours away. It can be used to freshen your carpets too. Just sprinkle a little on the carpet and then vacuum. To remove tough scuff marks or grease spills from the floor, sprinkle with baking soda and then wipe with a warm, damp cloth. To remove stubborn stains in the bathroom (bath, sink, counter, floor), make a paste of 3 parts baking soda and 1 part water, then apply, let stand, then scrub clean.



TIP: Cleaning toilet bowls

Use baking soda and vinegar. Wet the sides of the bowl with the toilet brush. Generously sprinkle the sides with baking soda, and splash on some vinegar. (It will foam.) Scrub clean. And the baking soda also acts as a deodorizer.

