

# OPTIMAL HEALTH UNIVERSITY™

Presented by Katie Gravesen, DC

## Make a Clean Sweep of Toxic Household Cleaners

*You've thoroughly cleaned your house. It looks better, smells better and makes you feel better — you've created a cleaner, more sanitary, healthier environment for you and your family, right? Maybe not. Dr. Gravesen wants patients to understand that, depending on what cleaning products you use, you could be doing more harm than good.*



Read on to learn more about the hazards lurking in your cleaning supplies and information Dr. Gravesen has gathered on natural alternatives, including recipes for some homemade cleaners!

### Unhealthy Cleaning

The majority of today's mainstream cleaning supplies contain dangerous chemicals, including ammonia, chlorine bleach, glycol ethers and alkylphenol ethoxylates (APEs).

Exposure to these chemicals has been linked to both immediate health concerns (such as respiratory irritation) and long-term health effects (such as asthma and cancer). The following is a sampling of the most recent research into the health effects of exposure to cleaning chemicals.

#### Asthma Association

Numerous studies have linked bleach-containing cleaning products with

asthma. One study concluded: "Asthma symptoms in domestic cleaning women are associated with exposure to bleach and possibly other irritant agents. The public health impact of the use of irritant cleaning products could be widespread since the use of these products is common both in the workplace and at home." (*Occup Environ Med* 2005;62:598-606.)

And this link has now been established in nonprofessional cleaners as well. One study investigated the "respiratory effects of nonprofessional home cleaning" and found that: "The use of cleaning sprays at least weekly ... was associated with the incidence of asthma symptoms or medication and wheeze. The incidence of physician-diagnosed asthma was higher among those using sprays at least 4 days per week." The study concludes: "Frequent use of common household cleaning sprays may be an important risk factor for adult asthma." (*Am J Respir Crit Care Med* 2007 15;176:735-41.)

And unfortunately, the risk is not confined to those doing the cleaning. Studies have found that a mother's use of cleaning products during pregnancy ups the risk of wheezing and lung function abnormalities in children (*Eur Respir J* 2008;31:547-54).

#### Cancer Connection

State epidemiologists from Oregon recently made a startling report to the Federal Agency for Toxic Substances



and Disease Registry in Atlanta. "Former workers at the View Master plant in Beaverton, Oregon, died of pancreatic cancer twice as frequently as the general population and of kidney cancer three times as often." (*Medical Letter on the CDC & FDA* 2003.)

The suspected cause? Water from a well contaminated with high levels of trichloroethylene (TCE), a commercial degreaser allegedly dumped on the ground near the plant.

Another study also established a link between TCE exposure and prostate cancer (*Am J Ind Med* 2007;50:383-90).

In addition, a greater-than-normal risk of bladder cancer was recently linked to housekeepers, launderers, drycleaners and butlers — all of whom use cleaning supplies on a regular basis (*J Occup Environ Med* 2002;44:685).



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### Make Your Own Mirror and Glass Cleaner

Half-cup white vinegar  
Half-cup rosemary tea  
Five to six drops rosemary essential oil

### Make Your Own All-Purpose Surface Scrub

Half-cup baking soda  
Quarter-cup dried and crushed lemon balm leaves  
Quarter-cup dried and crushed lavender leaves  
One teaspoon cream of tartar  
Five drops lavender essential oil

### Make Your Own Air Freshener (in a spray bottle)

One teaspoon baking soda  
One teaspoon vinegar (or lemon juice)  
2 cups hot water

### Reproductive Repercussions

Animal studies have linked glycol ethers, solvents commonly found in glass cleaners and all-purpose spray cleaners, to reduced fertility and low birth weight (*Gynecol Obstet Fertil* 2006;34:955-63).

### Combination Concerns

The simultaneous use of multiple cleansers — particularly bleaching formulas — is extremely dangerous. This deadly mix generates invisible clouds of toxic fumes, particularly in poorly ventilated areas.

According to one scientific study, the inhaled gases cause “respiratory tract irritation with cough, labored breathing and sometimes pulmonary edema. Headache, vertigo, cyanosis and hy-

potension are common and additional criteria for hospitalization.” (*J Toxicology: Clin Toxicology* 2002;40:355.)

### Environmental Effects

In addition to raising severe health issues, many of today’s commercial cleaning products pose hazards to the environment.

Everything that flows down the drain or into a landfill eventually ends up in the water supply. This is particularly true for people who rely on wells, as opposed to municipal water supplies.

### The Tide Is Turning

Fortunately, consumer demand for safer cleaning alternatives has led to a slew of new, safer, natural products. Even the Clorox Company introduced a new line of “green” products — Green Works™ — earlier this year.

Additional manufacturers of alternative cleaning products include Trader Joe’s®, Seventh Generation®, Earth Friendly Products®, Global Balance Products and Moon Works®. For an extensive list of manufacturers of all-natural cleaning products, see National Geographic’s Green Guide at [www.thegreenguide.com](http://www.thegreenguide.com).

### Beware of the “Go Green” Bandwagon

Keep in mind that “all natural,” “green” products mean big bucks for

manufacturers, which means they’ll fight to get those words on their labels.

And labeling in the cleaning products industry is highly unregulated, including the use of terms like “green,” “natural” and “nontoxic.” Manufacturers are also not required to list all of their ingredients. So even if the label claims that all ingredients are disclosed, there’s no guarantee.

Manufacturers are, however, required to list health warnings. So if a label says “Danger,” “Poison” or “Warning” — that’s a clue that harmful ingredients are included. Also look for specific terms like “no solvents,” “no phosphates” or “plant-based,” which are more meaningful than non-specific terms like “natural” or “ecologically friendly.”

### Safety First

Just because a cleaning product features natural ingredients doesn’t mean it’s nontoxic or non-irritating. Always use gloves and hospital masks while cleaning. Keep *all* cleaning supplies out of the reach of children, and make sure everyone in your household knows where to find the poison control center phone number.

### No Substitute for Homemade

Avoid all the worries about toxic chemicals by making your own cleaning solutions! A few simple ingredients and a little elbow grease will take care of most of your cleaning needs. Get started with the recipes in the sidebar on this page. For more green cleaning recipes, see Consumer Reports’ Greener Choices site at [www.greenerchoices.org](http://www.greenerchoices.org) or Greenpeace’s site at [www.greenpeace.org](http://www.greenpeace.org).

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