Is Your Home Hazardous to Your Health?

Home is where the heart is—but it may also be a danger zone. It turns out that harmful substances found in everyday household items can be hazardous to your health.

According to recent studies, older people and young children are particularly vulnerable to the damaging effects of these products. However, a new study shows that a high degree of environmental awareness may help Americans reduce their exposure to hazardous products. That’s why it’s important to do your homework and understand which products carry a high risk.

Here are a few of the potentially hazardous household products you may want to avoid. While you may not be able to cut these things out of your life altogether, you should try to limit your exposure to these items:

Cleaning products

Many cleaning products contain substances like ammonia and chlorine bleach—two substances that can be extremely toxic. Ammonia is known to trigger asthma, and chlorine bleach is a lung irritant that can be fatal if swallowed. Additionally, some cleaning products include a substance called glycol ethers, which is used to dissolve dirt. When absorbed in the skin this chemical can cause nerve damage.

Be sure to wear rubber gloves if you are cleaning with any of these products, and keep the room well ventilated. You may also want to wear a mask so that you don’t breathe in the fumes. If you want to avoid these cleaners altogether, you could try using hydrogen peroxide, white vinegar or baking soda instead.

Paint products

The fumes from paint and paint solvents, including turpentine and mineral spirits, can be harmful to your health. According to the Environmental Protection Agency’s Aging Initiative, when these items are used improperly, the fumes can stress your lungs and heart and even contribute to an irregular heartbeat. This is caused by volatile organic compounds (VOCs) contained in these products.

Be sure to use and store these types of products in a well ventilated area. You may also consider buying VOC-free paints, which are available in some stores.

Pesticides

The EPA says that people who have weakened hearts or lungs should avoid exposure to pesticides because it could lead to arrhythmia or heart attacks. Additionally, some studies claim that there could be a link between exposure to pesticides and Parkinson’s disease. Research suggests that certain people carry a gene that makes them more susceptible to Parkinson’s—and when these people are exposed to pesticides, it could trigger the disease.

Clothing

Believe it or not, the shirt on your own back could be contributing to health problems. Many permanent press fabrics and older flame-retardant and water-repellent materials contain formaldehyde, which can irritate your upper respiratory system. Clothing companies aren’t required to list these chemicals on their labels. However, experts suggest that you stick with untreated clothing made from natural fibers like cotton.

Nonstick pans
As wonderful as these pans are for stick-free cooking, they can also be harmful to your health. At normal cooking temperatures, these pans aren’t dangerous. However, if you leave an empty nonstick pan on a burner for an extended amount of time, it can release 15 different toxic chemicals, including two carcinogens.

**Carpet pads and old furniture stuffing**

A flame retardant known as polybrominated diphenyl ethers used in some carpet pads and stuffing in older furniture and mattresses can be unsafe. Some studies show that this substance can affect the thyroid gland as well as the nervous and reproductive systems.

If you own an older couch or mattress, make sure that no stuffing is exposed. If there is some stuffing hanging out of a rip in your old couch, seal the rip properly to reduce your exposure.