Breast-Feeding

Breast-feeding is recommended for a period of at least one year, since it provides important, proven benefits to both mother and child. Benefits include:

- **Nurturing**: Breast-feeding provides emotional comfort and a unique bond between mother and child.
- **Nutritional**: Breast milk is nutritionally balanced and easy to digest.
- **Economic**: Breast-feeding is less expensive than formula feeding.
- **Health**: Breast-feeding may reduce the risk of developing certain diseases such as diabetes and obesity.


To avoid these toxic chemicals, mothers and mothers-to-be can help protect their current and future children by taking some simple steps in their homes and gardens to reduce exposures to harmful chemicals. This fact sheet provides busy parents with some basic information on how to avoid these toxic chemicals. There is much more information available from organizations dedicated to protecting children. Please see the resources throughout this fact sheet for listings of some of these groups.
Reducing Risks from Pesticides

Pesticides are chemicals that kill or repel animal pests. There are many different kinds in use in the home, garden, and on pets. Pesticides are toxic to people too, especially children. When selecting foods, try to give your kids a varied diet that is well-balanced with plenty of fruits and vegetables. Many of these foods have pesticide residues on them. However, you can take these steps to reduce exposures:

- Peel and wash fruits and vegetables. This can in some cases remove pesticides from the surface.
- Buy organic or bio-cultivated (grown without pesticides). Buying organic also helps support the growers and distributors of organic foods, which will help reduce the costs of these foods and make them more available to all people.
- If possible, grow your own vegetables without pesticides.

On pets, do not use chemical tick and flea collars or flea dips. Choose non-toxic alternatives. Wash and comb your pet regularly, and keep pet bedding clean to control and prevent flea infestations. More information on non-toxic treatment and prevention can be found at sources listed below or at http://www.pesticide.org/factsheets.html.

Reducing Risks from Lead

There are plenty of easy, low-cost things you can do to reduce pollution in and around your home. Some actions you can take to create a healthier home environment for your children are as simple as keeping your plants in your home that help clean the air or take off your shoes at the door so you don’t track in chemicals. Some may require small changes in your habits, by buying non-toxic cleaning products.

- Have your soil tested for lead. If lead is present, do not grow vegetables in it. If you must grow your own vegetables, remove at least the first 6 inches and cover with new soil.

Find out more:
- National Safety Council’s National Lead Information Center has information, publications, and technical assistance in English or Spanish. (800) 424-LEAD
- Alliance to End Childhood Lead Poisoning (AELCP) offers newsletters, fact sheets, policy statements, and other resources useful to preventing lead poisoning among children. Among fact sheet topics are general information on lead poisoning, testing homes, screening children, and advice on painting and rehabilitation. 202-543-1147
  http://www.aelcp.org

Reducing Risks from Mercury

(outside Healthy Section for mercury in food)

Some consumer products contain mercury. Make sure you dispose of these products properly.

- Mercury thermometers are still in many medicine chests. Don’t throw your old ones away; return them in the waste stream and contaminate the water supply. Check with your Board of Health to find out if your community or a local hospital is planning a mercury thermometer exchange, and turn in your old one for a new digital thermometer. Never vacuum mercury from a broken thermometer. Swop it up with a broom, put it in a closed container, and dispose of as household hazardous waste. Do not discard mercury in the sink, toilet, or trash, as it will end up in the waste stream.
- Fluorescent light tubes that are energy-efficient can contain mercury. Check to see if your community recycles these items. If not, save them for your community’s recycling program. Most large mercury-containing household waste collection bodies. Some batteries (mainly small button batteries) still contain mercury. Try to buy mercury-free batteries and recycle those with mercury with your community recycling, or at stores that recycle batteries.

Find out more:
- Health Care Without Harm can provide information on eliminating mercury, how to exchange mercury thermometers, and how to keep a broken mercury thermometer.
  http://www.noaharm.org

Healthy Food Can Help Protect Your Child

Eating more vegetables, beans, grains, and low or nonfat animal products is healthiest for you and your child. Fat can be reduced in the diet of children older than 2 years of age. Many chemical pollutants build up to high levels in animals, particularly in animal fat. These chemicals also can store in your body, and are passed from mother to fetus during the most sensitive period of brain development. By eating a healthy diet yourself before and during pregnancy and breast-feeding, you can help protect your unborn and nursing child. Fetal exposures are best prevented by lifestyle habits that minimize your intake of toxic chemicals.

- Eating less animal fat is important since most harmful chemicals are stored in animal fat. Eating less fat is also better for your general health.
- Buy organic foods (especially cheese), processed foods, meat, fish, and chicken. You can lower your fat intake by consuming only low-fat animal products, such as nonfat or low-fat milk and cheeses, and lean meat, poultry, and fish, and by cutting away any fat that can be trimmed before cooking.
- Avoid processed foods made from ground meat and animal parts such as sausage, bologna, hot dogs, and canned, ground-lean meats which are very high in animal fats.
- Mercury, unlike other harmful chemicals, stores in the muscle of the fish, not the fat. Therefore, fish that contain high levels of mercury should be avoided. High mercury fish include swordfish, shark, king mackerel, tilefish, fresh tautog, and some freshwater fish. (Many rivers and lakes in the U.S. are polluted with mercury.) Canned tuna, which is moderately high in mercury, should be limited to less than 7 ounces a week for adults (about 1 cup of a small can) and 2 ounces a week for children (less than one-third of a small can). Choose instead fish which are lower in mercury and other pollutants, such as cod, haddock, and pollack as healthier alternatives.
  - Other less expensive, low-fat protein sources include beans, lean chicken, turkey, and eggs without the yolk.
- Plastics and plastic additives can leach into food products from containers. Some plastics contain chemicals that may be toxic to the developing fetus. The developing reproductive tract is particularly vulnerable. Do not store food in plastic wraps or microwave it in plastic wraps or containers.

Out of Harm’s Way: Reducing Toxic Threats to Child Development

Creating a Healthy Environment for Your Child’s Development

Personal Guidelines for Parents and Future Parents

Reducing Risks from Lead

Lead is a metal that interferes with normal child development. Lead is sometimes used in household water pipes, paint, and other products. Children under 6 years old are most likely to get lead poisoning. They get it from putting things in their mouths that may be contaminated with lead dust (their hands, toys, or pacifiers), from eating lead paint chips, and from chewing on window sills or door frames with lead paint. A blood test is the only way to detect lead poisoning. There are often no obvious symptoms. Your child is at risk if he is your pediatrician or family physician for lead, beginning at age 6 months old and at yearly intervals until age 6.

- If you live in a home built before 1978, it is likely to have lead paint. The paint should be tested by a professional, especially if it is peeling.

- When possible, lead paint should be removed, but only by trained, licensed personnel, since removal can create even more problems when not done properly with the right equipment. Never sand or remove paint yourself that may contain lead. When lead paint cannot be removed, it should be contained. Be sure to cover leaded surfaces with a finish that is lead-free. Use paint that is low in indoor emissions, and apply it to the surface to form a barrier. Wash children’s hands and toys regularly. Surfaces and floors should be wiped regularly with a damp cloth or mop. If you need to vacuum, use a “true HEPA” vacuum (check the label) that filters fine dust. Never use a household vacuum or broom to clean up leaded paint dust.

- Check product labels for the presence of lead. Avoid products such as candles with lead wicks and pottery with lead glaze. Do not use hair dyes and lipsticks that may contain lead.

- You cannot see, taste, or smell lead in your drinking water. To be safe, run tap water for a minute or two in the morning to discharge water that may be contaminated with leaded solder (used for sealing joints until 1986, and still commonly used in taps and water coolers). Always use cold water for drinking, cooking, or infant formula.

Avoid Solvents

Alcohol, beverages, gasoline, most fiber pesticides, pesticides in the environment, and some cleaning solutions and cosmetics contain solvents. Most dry cleaning is done using a toxic solvent.

- Pregnant women should forego all alcohol in pregnancy. Drinking alcohol, or even alcohol exposure very early in pregnancy can disrupt brain development, it would be prudent to continued

Use Safer Building Materials and Furnishings

- Toxic fumes and dust are commonly present during demolition and new construction. Pregnant women and young children should avoid exposure to home renovations and construction areas.
- Bonded wood products (plywood, chipboard), and carpeting, and furniture may release toxic volatile organic compounds (see non-toxic furnishing). Building and construction materials when possible, such as solid woods and natural, untreated fabrics.
- Carpets may contain pollutants (including lead, pesticides, and other contaminants) in your house. They should be removed, if possible, from children’s bedrooms and play areas. Lead-soaked carpets can contaminate the air and release toxic fumes. Carpets and area rugs should be washed frequently to remove pollutants. Avoid using a vacuum unless it has a “true HEPA” filter (check the label); because vacuuming can lift pollutants into the air.

Use Safer Household and Personal Care Products

- Many cleaning and deodorizing products, including antibacterial soaps, bleach, ammonia, air fresheners, and some cosmetics and personal care products may contain toxic solvents, suspected endocrine-disrupting chemicals, and sometimes pesticides. Check labels for ingredients.
- Commercially toxic non-pesticide cleaning products are available, or you can make simple cleaning solutions with substances such as baking soda, vinegar. Salt is also a solute. The use of scrubbing pads and brushes can also eliminate the need for chemical cleaning agents.

- Avoid using non-toxic cleaning products.
- Avoid all dry cleaning. Most dry cleaning is done by using a toxic solvent.
- Many furniture products (including spreads, glues, adhesives, paint thinners, and some cleaning solutions and cosmetics contain solvents. Most dry cleaning is done using a toxic solvent.
- Avoid using a vacuum unless it has a “true HEPA” filter (check the label); because vacuuming can lift pollutants into the air.
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