

Ways to reduce the number of chemicals in your life

Everyday advice if you are expecting a child



Region Örebro County

Occupational and Environmental Medicine

Chemicals are everywhere

We are constantly exposed to chemicals as they are everywhere in our environment and our lives. Some are harmful, some are not. They can be found in many of our everyday products, such as textiles, electronics, furniture, toys, and plastic products.

We can absorb chemicals into our body via the food we eat and the water we drink. When we use certain products, they could leak substances that then enter our body.

In today's world chemicals can be found everywhere, and it is not known how they affect our health and the environment in the long term. That is why we need to be cautious and avoid substances that are suspected of having an adverse effect on our health.





A foetus is sensitive

The placenta acts as a barrier between the mother and the foetus. It prevents certain toxins from passing through it, but it does not fully protect the foetus. It is therefore advisable to reduce the number of chemicals that you come into contact with.

In this brochure we provide you with advice on:

- Work
- Food and water
- Washing and cleaning
- Electrical appliances and toys
- Cosmetic products



Your employer is responsible for your work environment

There are a number of risk factors in the work environment that need to be addressed if you are pregnant or breastfeeding.

Your employer is responsible for your work environment. It is therefore important that you tell your employer as soon as possible that you are pregnant. This will allow them to investigate at an early stage the risks you may be exposed to at work. The risk assessment is governed by Work Environment Authority document AFS 2007:5, which relates to employees who are pregnant or breastfeeding.

The risk assessment is carried out by the manager and the employee who

is pregnant. The assessment includes examining and making decisions about various chemical, physical, biological, psychosocial, and ergonomic risk factors. It is not certain that all the risk factors are present in your particular job. Harmful chemicals in a work environment could include mercury, tobacco smoke, and certain hairdressing products. The assessment will indicate if your job can be adapted or if you need to be transferred to other duties to avoid any risks. If neither of these options is possible, you can apply for pregnancy benefit through the Social Insurance Agency. You have the same rights even if you are self-employed.

Follow specific advice about food

Certain foods could contain metal residue, environmental toxins, or insecticides. Rice products could contain arsenic for example. Fatty fish caught in the Baltic, the Gulf of Bothnia, Lake Vänern and Lake Vättern could contain environmental toxins such as dioxins and PCBs.

The National Food Agency therefore issues specific advice and guidelines on how often children, young people, pregnant women, and women who are breastfeeding can eat these and other foods to ensure they avoid any adverse effects.





Check the drinking water from your well

If you have your own well you are personally responsible for carrying out regular quality controls to ensure the water is not harmful to health. This is particularly important if you are pregnant or if the water is drunk by children. A foetus or a child is more sensitive than an adult to high levels of certain substances, such as lead. It is recommended that you check the water at least once every three years. Your local authority can provide you with information about what needs to be measured in your particular area.

The National Food Agency provides advice on what you are required to do when you analyse your water.

Always use cold water

Hot tap water could contain copper from the pipes. You should therefore let the tap run until the water is cold, even when you only plan to use the water for cooking. This applies to water from the municipal water supply as well as water from your own well.



Be careful with dietary supplements, herbal products, and naturopathic medicines

If you are pregnant or breastfeeding you should be careful when it comes to dietary supplements, herbal products, naturopathic medicines, and traditional plant-based medicines. A foetus and a newborn child could be more sensitive to different substances than you are.

In the case of naturopathic medicines and traditional plant-based medicines, information can be found in the customer information leaflet or on the

packaging stating whether the product is suitable for use during pregnancy or when breastfeeding.

Dietary supplements often lack this type of information as there is insufficient knowledge about the risks associated with their use during pregnancy and when breastfeeding. Talk to your midwife, the nurse at the child welfare centre, or your doctor before taking these products.

Use glass and ceramic containers when you heat up food and liquids

When plastic is heated up it may release chemicals. The chemicals could then be transferred to food and liquids. You should preferably not heat up food in a microwave using plastic bowls or other

plastic containers. Even if the plastic is approved for use in a microwave, it is still recommended that you heat up food in a glass or ceramic container or in a pan on the stove.



Wash new clothes and textiles

Chemicals are often used to give textiles colour, to prevent them from creasing, or from being damaged by moisture when they are transported over long distances.

You should therefore wash new textiles, such as clothes, bedding,

towels, and soft toys, before using them for the first time. You should preferably use an environmentally labelled, fragrance-free detergent. It would be better for your health and for the environment.





Keep dust away

Products found in the home could spread chemical substances into the air or into dust that has collected on surfaces. The more products there are in the home, such as toys, textiles, and electronics, the more chemicals there are that could be released into the indoor environment.

Good ventilation and airing

Paint, building materials, and textiles all release chemicals – and they do so most frequently when they are new. You should be particularly careful to air the room after you have renovated or purchased new furniture.

Mopping

As young children often play and crawl around on the floor, they could breathe in or swallow dust. You should therefore think carefully about keeping dust away from floors and other surfaces as much as you can. Certain vacuum cleaner filters permit tiny particles of dust to pass through them, allowing the particles to return to the room. It is advisable to mop floors and wipe down surfaces regularly.

Choose environmentally labelled products whenever possible as they have undergone stricter health and environmental controls.



Ensure goods purchased online are safe

Goods purchased outside the EU could contain substances that are banned in Sweden. These include softening agents in plastic toys and lead in jewellery. Products sold within the EU are subject to certain legal requirements when it comes to chemicals. When you buy online for example, it is recommended that you think carefully about which country the product comes from.

Stricter rules within the EU

In the case of toys and electronics, you can check to see if the product is CE-marked. This is confirmation by the manufacturer that the products satisfy European safety requirements. This does not necessarily mean the products are free from harmful chemicals, but they must at least meet basic EU health, environmental, and safety requirements.



Reduce the use of cosmetic products

Products that you use to wash or moisten your body, wash your hair, or use as make-up are known as cosmetic products. They all contain chemicals. You should therefore not use more shampoo, soap, or skin cream than is necessary.

Avoid scented products

Fragrances used in different products could be allergenic. Allergies are a growing problem in Sweden and could be caused by a whole range of substances, both artificial and natural. It is recommended that you choose unscented products.



Avoid hair dye and tattoos

Colouring your hair using a permanent dye means that you run the risk of developing a contact allergy. Some countries recommend that pregnant women do not colour their hair although a number of these recommendations have not yet been issued by the Swedish authorities. If you are concerned, you should avoid colouring your hair while you are pregnant.

Permanent tattoos

Permanent tattoos contain substances that should be avoided if you are

pregnant or breastfeeding. Inspection tests have revealed banned substances in tattoo inks. Pregnant women also have a weakened immune system and tattoos could cause skin problems and increase the infection risk, including blood-borne infections.

Black henna tattoos

Black henna tattoos normally involve the use of inks that could cause serious health problems. You could also develop a lifelong contact allergy and hypersensitivity. You should avoid being tattooed with henna ink.



Further reading

Sources and further information:

Pregnant at work

Information about pregnancy and working life is available on the Work Environment Authority website, www.av.se

Food and water

Read more on the Food Agency website, www.livsmedelsverket.se

Children and chemicals

If you would like to know more about children and chemicals, go to the 1177 Healthcare Guide website, www.1177.se

Specific substances

If you have any thoughts regarding specific chemical substances, go to the Chemical Agency website, www.kemi.se

Cosmetic products

Further information is available on the Medical Products Agency website, www.lakemedelsverket.se

Contact us

If you have any questions, you can contact Occupational and Environmental Medicine at Örebro University Hospital.

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What can I do?

Chemicals can be found everywhere, and certain chemicals could have an adverse effect on our health. We still do not have a complete picture of how they affect us and our environment. But what we do know is that it is good for us and for the environment if we come into contact with fewer chemicals.

This brochure provides advice on the choices you can make to reduce the number of chemicals you are exposed to in everyday life.



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