



## **Dangerous Scents?**

For most people, perfumed products are considered a pleasant part of the day. With bracing soaps and scrubs in the shower, to fresh scented laundry detergent and softeners, to room sprays and candles that offset not so nice household smells – our day begins and ends with scent. Today, fragrances are used in almost every cleaning, laundry, and personal-care product on the market. So what's wrong with a day filled with olfactory delights? For one thing, many perfumes are made of toxic chemicals. The large majority of fragrance chemicals are synthetic compounds, with most being synthesized from petroleum products or byproducts such as turpentine. In fact, many of the chemicals in perfume are the same chemicals in cigarette smoke. And we don't just smell these fragrances - these chemicals go directly into our bloodstream when applied to our skin and are absorbed into the skin from our clothing and linens. We also inhale the chemical fumes, which then go straight to our brains where they can do major harm.

The use of fragrance has increased ten-fold since the 1950s. During the 1970s fragrance became a part of daily life and by the 1980s the fragrance industry doubled in size. With this increase in use and exposure, serious health concerns have emerged.

Fragrance exposure isn't always intentional – people who never wear perfume generally use more than half a dozen scented products daily. Because virtually all fragrance chemicals are volatile compounds, everyone leaves a bit of their fragranced products behind in the air everywhere they go and wherever they sit. Multiplied times the number of people in an office or crowded public place and the exposure is tremendous.

Statistically, few people have significant negative impacts from fragrance, essentially because the healthier a person is the more tolerance there is toward less than optimal conditions. Yet the very young and the very old have higher risks. The young because many of the systems of the body are still developing and the old because body processes do not work quite as well as they did, and as with the young - skin is usually thinner – which means substances are more readily absorbed by the skin.

A study by Greenpeace in 2005 discovered that at least 36 well-known perfume brands contained two toxic man-made chemicals "phthalate esters and synthetic musk." It is not acute poisoning, but it is chronic, it stays in the system and accumulates in the fatty tissues of living organisms.



Phthalates have a bad effect on the DNA, male sperm and restricts lung function in men. And according to the Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) Analysis of the 1991 EPA Study, serious side effects of daily exposure to scents include everything from minor issues such as irritation and cracking of skin and fatigue, to major issues such as neurotoxin reactions of the central and peripheral nervous system causing anything from coma, convulsion, headache, and depression, to dizziness, irritability, confusion, panic attacks/anxiety, and loss of muscular coordination. Worse, continuous low-level exposure to neurotoxins can lead to progressive and permanent brain damage as well as damage to the immune systems, kidney and liver.

To add perspective, studies show that one in five people experience health problems when exposed to fragrance, including bronchospasm and asthma, especially in children. What can you do? First, don't assume because a product states that the fragrance is "natural" or contains essential oils – that it is safe. Second, as part of your efforts for better living, purchase and use products that don't contain fragrance or are close to nature. Vinegar and baking soda make great cleaning products, candles don't have to be scented, and a match can eliminate that not so nice household scent.

[www.ArchEnvironHealth](http://www.ArchEnvironHealth) ,1998, Mar-Apr 53 (2) 138-146

[www.preventcancer.com/consumers/cosmetics/fragrances](http://www.preventcancer.com/consumers/cosmetics/fragrances)

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