Detox Your Life – Hidden Chemicals in Household Cleaners (Part 4) Transcript

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Intro to Doctor Talks and Detox Your Life

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Over time, that same residue also builds up inside your washing machine, potentially damaging it and creating an ideal environment for mold growth. Welcome to Doctor Talks, the podcast where every episode leads to a healthier you.

Join us as we navigate the world of optimal health. Uncovering groundbreaking strategies to conquer chronic disease. In each episode, we'll bring you the latest insights from leading health experts, medical innovators, and wellness warriors.

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This is Doctor Talks, real talk from real doctors on the issues that matter to you most. Welcome back to to week four of Detox Your Life. Swapping out personal care products, which we talked about last week, takes time.

While you're welcome to toss and replace everything at once, you could just as easily use up the products you have and when it's time to replace them, do so with something without the ingredients of concern that we discussed last week.

In this week's session, we're going to look at household cleaners and the unique exposures that we get from them. We will also touch a little bit on indoor air quality, something which people often overlook.

Our final session next week is just about indoor air quality, but there is some overlap when it comes to cleaning products. The primary way we're exposed to chemicals in household cleaners is through inhalation.

That's important because the fastest way a chemical can enter the bloodstream outside of injection is through inhalation. Most conventional household cleaners release chemicals called VOCs, or volatile organic compounds that easily evaporate into the air.

Some VOCs are natural, like those that give flowers their scent, while others are synthetic, like the smell of fresh paint. Not all VOCs are harmful, but many found in cleaning products can be.

While it's technically possible to have an acute exposure, like accidentally spraying a harsh chemical in your eyes or swallowing bleach. What we're really dealing with in day to day life is low level, ongoing exposure.

This kind of chronic exposure is far more common and concerning.

Household Cleaners and VOC Exposure

More severe acute exposures typically happen in industrial settings, such as with methylene chloride in paint strippers. A chemical linked to over 80 deaths.

Acute exposure to VOCs can trigger a wide range of symptoms, depending on the chemical and the level of exposure. People might experience irritation of the eyes, nose, or throat, along with headaches, nausea, dizziness,

or fatigue.

Some may notice allergic reactions, skin rashes, or worsening of asthma. In more serious cases, symptoms can include difficulty with memory, concentration, coordination, or even changes in mood like irritability or depression, and extremely high levels.

Certain VOCs can be fatal. With household cleaners, you might notice some of the same symptoms as with acute exposure. But the bigger concern is the impact of small, repeated exposures over time.

What we call chronic exposure. This happens when you've been using products with harmful VOCs for years or even decades, or simply from living near sources of urban pollution where these compounds linger in the air.

Chronic exposure has been linked to serious long term health issues, including low birth weight, birth defects, kidney damage, lower testosterone, decreased sperm count, and even increased risk of cancer and leukemia, especially in children.

Surprisingly, the VOCs released from household cleaners and other everyday products like perfumes, are a major source of outdoor air pollution. In 2018, a study found that these common items actually rival motor vehicles when it comes to VOC emissions.

In fact, the researchers concluded that the household products are now one of the leading contributors to urban air pollution. Outdoor air pollution often gets more attention, but it's actually inside our homes where pollutants can build up to much higher levels.

Unlike the outdoors, where pollutants are diluted in vast amounts of air, indoor spaces trap them. In fact, the EPA has found that indoor air can be 2 to 5 times more polluted than outdoor air and sometimes even over 100 times worse.

Since most of us spend about 90% of our time indoors, it's critical to to reduce as many sources of indoor air pollution as we can. Before we dive into specific ingredients and products, it's important to address how much we tend to overuse cleaning products and how marketing plays a big role in that.

In most cases, we don't actually need to disinfect our homes on a daily basis. Sure, it makes sense if someone is sick or you're cleaning up raw meat.

But for everyday use, heavy, heavy disinfecting is unnecessary. So why do we reach for industrial strength cleaners? As if we're fighting off a biohazard?

A lot of it comes down to decades of advertising. Phrases like kills 99.99% of germs, decent effects, or industrial strength have shaped our beliefs and habits.

Convincing us this stronger is always better. Even when it's not needed in the home, according to the Natural Resources Defense Council, the average American uses about 25 gallons of toxic chemical products at home each year.

It wasn't always this way. People used to clean their homes with just a few basic products. But today, the household cleaner industry has exploded into a 34 billion global market projected to reach nearly 47 billion by 2026.

With so many options on the shelves, many of which have nearly identical ingredients, it's no wonder we've ended up with cabinets full of different sprays and solutions.

Just take a stroll down the cleaning aisle and you'll see exactly what I mean. One trend that's become increasingly common is the cleaning product industry is greenwashing.

You've probably seen IT products that look eco friendly because of their packaging or buzzwords. Greenwashing is when a product is made to seem more environmentally friendly than it actually is.

It's all about appearances, using terms and images that suggest a product is safe or natural, even if the ingredients tell a different story. A good example of greenwashing came in 2020, when a class action lawsuit was filed against SC Johnson and Sun for what many saw as misleading marketing.

They had labeled one of their Windex products with phrases like nontoxic formula, even though the ingredients didn't quite live up to that claim. Two other popular brands that are often seen as green or healthier options are Method and Mrs.

Myers. While their packaging and marketing give off a natural, eco friendly vibe, a closer look at the ingredients show that they may not be as clean or nontoxic as they appear.

The problem is that both Method and Mrs. Myers use synthetic fragrances and other questionable ingredients, which means they're not quite as green as their branding suggests.

Despite the eco friendly image, the reality doesn't always match the marketing. Let's take a look at some of the main ingredients and the products that raised concern.

Many of these chemicals are found in most conventional cleaning products, so if you check the labels at home, you'll probably spot a few of them. One important thing to remember is that when we use these products, especially sprays or anything with a scent, the chemicals don't just disappear.

They linger and often settle into the dust in our homes. Keep that in mind. We'll come back to it later. The first ingredient to watch for is one we've talked about before fragrance.

It's that vague catch all term used for proprietary scent blends.

Greenwashing and Problem Ingredients

We won't go too deep into it here since we covered it in our personal care product lesson, but it's worth noting that cleaning products tend to contain much higher levels of fragrance, along with more phthalates.

These are the chemicals that help the scent stick around longer. If you've ever used a scented laundry detergent and noticed your clothes still smell like it months later, that's phthalates at work.

Another common ingredient in many household cleaners is glycol esters. These solvents go by a variety of names and are often used in degreaser because they're so effective at breaking down tough grime, but they come with serious concerns.

According to the EPA, chronic exposure to glycol esters has been linked to symptoms like fatigue, nausea, tremors, and even anemia. They've also been associated with asthma, allergies, developmental issues in children, miscarriages and male infertility, making them something worth avoiding whenever possible.

Bleach is probably the most familiar disinfectant out there. Most of us have a bottle sitting around somewhere at home. Also known as sodium hypochlorite, bleach is a chlorine based chemical that acts as a powerful antimicrobial and oxidizer.

It's been the go to disinfectant for decades, used on kitchen counters, bathroom surfaces, toilets, grout, and even in the laundry. But unlike many of the other fragrances we've been discussing, bleach is acutely dangerous.

It can cause skin burns, eye injuries, and that slippery feeling when it touches your skin. That's the tissue starting to break down. Bleach can also react with other common household ingredients, like soaps and surfactants to create halogen VOCs.

Harmful compounds like carbon tetrachloride, which is considered a probable human carcinogen, and a strong greenhouse gas. And despite its widespread use, bleach is only effective on hard, non-porous surfaces, and even then that level of disinfection is rarely necessary in a typical home.

Next up are formaldehyde releases, ingredients that over time can slowly release formaldehyde, a known carcinogen. These are often used as preservatives in cleaning products to extend shelf life.

While the amounts of released may be small, the concern is with long term repeated exposure. They can be a little tricky to identify on labels, but it's worth keeping an eye out for them.

One example is quaternary M15, which also falls into a category of disinfectants known as quat, quite short for quaternary ammonia, compounds are strong disinfectants and preservatives found thousands in thousands of everyday products.

While they're effective at killing germs, they've also been linked to allergic reactions in humans since their use spiked during the Covid pandemic. Researchers have been taking a closer look at their health impacts so far.

Occupational exposure to cats, especially in cleaning and health care settings, has been associated with an increased risk of asthma. This next ingredient is a mouthful, so we'll stick with its abbreviation MIT.

It's commonly found in liquid laundry detergents and isn't necessarily dangerous in terms of toxicity, but it's a well known contact allergen. If you have sensitive skin or are prone to rashes, mitt and other names it can go by can be an issue, especially in products that stay in contact with your skin for long periods, like clothing and bedsheets.

In fact, MIT was named the Contact Allergen of the year in 2013 by the American Contact Dermatitis Society. European regulators have taken it seriously, too.

By 2015, they banned its use in all new 11 products and severely restricted it in rinse off products to the point where it's no longer effective as a preservative.

Another group of concerning ingredients are non phenols and non phenol ether sites, added. That stop we're going to start slide 23 again. Okay. Sorry.

Slide 23 starting again. Another group of concerning ingredients are non phenols and non phenol. It's often abbreviated as NPIs. These chemicals are used in a wide range products not just cleaning supplies but also in food packaging, paints, plastics and more.

While they're found in many household products, our main source of exposure is actually through food, which makes them harder to avoid. NPS are known as endocrine disruptors and absorbance, meaning they can interfere with hormones and contribute to metabolic changes that promote weight gain.

They're also highly toxic to aquatic life and don't break down easily in the environment, since they're often used in products like laundry detergent that go straight down the drain.

They end up in our water systems, and because they're persistent, they can reenter the food chain through irrigation and bioaccumulation in fish and other aquatic animals, even at extremely low levels, lower than what most people are exposed to.

NPS have been linked to reproductive problems in women. Their use has been banned or heavily restricted in places like Canada and the European Union, and the U. S.

EPA has been reviewing them for over a decade. First on the list of concerning ingredients are antibacterials. As we touched on earlier, marketing has made us believe that every surface in our home needs to be disinfected and that our soaps must be antibacterial.

But the reality is we've gone overboard. The US disinfectant and anti-microbial industry is projected to hit 17.1 billion by 2027, with thousands of products flooding the market.

A 2001 CDC article noted that the number of antibacterial household products had exploded from just a few dozen in the mid 1990s to over 700. While these products were originally designed for hospitals to prevent the spread of serious infections, they've now made their way into healthy households.

Despite no proven added benefit in those settings, the article pointed out how the word germs has become a buzzword that drives unnecessary fear, pushing people to buy these products, thinking they're protecting their families.

But overusing antibacterials, especially at home, contributes to the growing crisis of antimicrobial resistance. This means the antibiotics we rely on become less effective, and that's a serious issue.

In 2019 alone, antibiotic resistance was linked to nearly 5 million deaths worldwide. The bottom line we don't need this level of antibacterial action in our homes.

Let's talk about fabric softeners.

Fabric Softeners, Dryer Sheets, and Home Fragrance

These products are packaged with many of the same harmful ingredients we've been trying to avoid VOCs, phthalates, allergenic fragrances, quartz, NPS, and more.

And here's the kicker they don't actually soften your clothes. What they really do is coat the fabric in a layer of quartz and waxes, which gives the illusion of softness.

Over time, that same residue also builds up inside your washing machine, potentially damaging it and creating an ideal environment for mold growth. Dryer sheets might seem like a gentler alternative to liquid fabric softeners, but they're really just the same thing in a different form.

Instead of adding softener to the wash dryer sheets release their chemicals during the drying cycle. Interestingly, they were invented in the late 1960s by a man trying to save his wife.

The hassle of running downstairs to add fabric softener during the rinse cycle. He later sold the patent to Procter and Gamble, and the dryer sheets hit the market in 1975.

These sheets are made with a mix of fatty acids, fatty alcohols, alcohol, oxalates, quaternary ammonia compounds, and synthetic fragrances. As they tumble in the dryer, the heat melts the fatty acids, allowing the chemical coating to transfer to your clothes.

That slick, soft feel you notice it's not the fabric, it's the residue. I'll share some safer, effective alternatives for softening clothes a little bit later on.

Next up are home fragrances. Many people enjoy creating a cozy, inviting atmosphere at home, and one of the easiest ways to do that, besides decor, is by adding scent through candles, diffusers, plug ins, and sometimes all three.

The home fragrance industry is booming, with a projection showing it could reach 27.63 billion by 2027. But these products are also a major source of unnecessary indoor air pollution.

Interestingly, market reports point out that one of the main factors holding back growth in this industry is the rising number of people with health issues related to lung conditions like asthma, COPD, pneumonia, as well as allergies.

In recent years, essential oils have become a much bigger part of the fragrance space, and we'll talk more about

those in just a bit. Scented candles are a popular way to add both fragrance and ambiance to a room, even when they're not lit, they still give off a noticeable scent.

Most are made from paraffin, a cheap byproduct of petroleum, though some use soy and other waxes. The issue is that scented candles release a mix of VOCs like formaldehyde, benzene, and toluene, whether they're burning or just sitting out.

These VOCs are known carcinogens, and while the levels may be low, regular use can mean consistent exposure. Even unscented candles can emit VOCs, and those labeled as made with essential oils might sound safer, but still produce VOCs and fine particulate matter when burned.

Like most things, it's about balance. Occasional candle use in a well-ventilated space is far less concerning. But if you or someone in your home has respiratory conditions like asthma, it's a good idea to avoid burning candles altogether.

Incense is another popular way to add fragrance to the home, often used in various spiritual practices. However, is significantly contributes to indoor air pollution.

Incense sticks are typically made from a mix of herbs, wood powders, fragrances, adhesives, and bamboo stick carrier sticks. When burned, they release a combination of VOCs like formaldehyde, benzene, toluene, and xylene, along with a large amount of particulate matter.

A 2008 study found that burning incense produces about 4.5 times the particulate matter of cigarets. Though it's important to note that this doesn't mean incense is more toxic than smoking.

As the study was only measuring particulate release, not the full range of chemicals in either product. Regular incense use in the home has been linked to asthma, allergies, headaches, cancers and increased risk of cardiovascular disease.

It's especially concerning for households with children. A study from Taiwan found that children in homes that burn incense regularly had up to a 78% higher rate of asthma and wheezing.

If you're burning incense or similar products like sage or palo santo occasionally and have good ventilation, it's less of a concern. But if it's a regular habit, it's worth reconsidering or cutting back.

Essential oils have become a go to for adding fragrance to the home. And while they do have therapeutic benefits like anti-microbial and antifungal properties or for use in aromatherapy, it's important to use them wisely.

There's a common assumption that because essential oils come from plants, they must be completely safe. But natural doesn't always mean harmless. After all, lead, arsenic, and mercury are natural, too, and they're highly toxic.

With their growing popularity, essential oils are often used excessively. Especially in diffusers that run constantly. And remember the pleasant scent you notice that's made up of VOCs.

Some are harmless, but others can be irritating. Trigger allergies, or even contribute to asthma. Essential oils can also be toxic to pets, since many animals don't have the enzymes needed to break them down.

So if you use essential oils, just do so with care. Less is often more. And finally, we've reached the least glamorous, but still incredibly important topic house dust.

I know dusting isn't anyone's favorite chore. But what's in that dust deserves our attention.

House Dust and Safer Cleaning Alternatives

Most people assume it's just a mix of dead skin cells, hair, and pet dander, which is unpleasant enough. But in reality, house dust often contains a cocktail of harmful chemicals.

Although spray cleaners, air fresheners and scented candles we just talked about, the chemicals they release don't just disappear. They settle onto surfaces and onto the dust that collects in your home.

On top of that, dust picks up chemicals that off gas from the furniture, carpeting, and even the flame retardants used in upholstered items. And it builds up over time.

Phthalates, the same ones we've discussed in plastics, personal care products and cleaning supplies have been found in every single house dust sample across multiple studies.

And it doesn't stop there. House dust also contains flame retardants, phenols like these phenols and nano phenols and PFAs chemicals, all of which have been measured consistently.

So while dusting may feel like a thankless task, it's actually one of the simplest ways to reduce your exposure to a whole range of indoor toxins. Okay, so yes, clearly we do need to clean our homes.

That's not up for debate. Cleanliness is important for our health and well-being, especially when it comes to things like preventing mold, bacteria, and allergens from building up.

The key isn't whether we clean, but how we clean. And making sure that the products we use aren't doing more harm than good in the process. The goal here is to find that sweet spot keeping our homes clean and healthy without exposing ourselves or our families to unnecessary chemicals.

It's not about giving up cleaning, but about being more mindful of the products we use and choosing safer alternatives where we can. The first step is to start avoiding, or at the very least, minimizing products that contain these harmful ingredients.

Anything with fragrance, glycol esters or Peg's bleach, formaldehyde release Rose quartz, NPS and Antibacterials. If you're using conventional cleaners, chances are most of them contain at least one, if not several of these.

At this point, you have a choice you can use up what you already have and switch to safer options as you run out. Or you can decide to get rid of them now and just make a clean break.

If you if you choose to toss them, just be sure to check your local guidelines for proper disposal. Many communities have designated drop off sites for what's considered hazardous household waste.

If that's not an option, at the very least, double bag the products and seal them tightly to protect sanitation workers from exposure. If you're ready to do a full sweep, set aside 20 to 30 minutes.

Sit down in front of your cleaning supply cabinet and pull everything out. Go through each label and separate out the products you want to replace. I'll be sharing some safer, safer alternatives with you shortly.

It wasn't that long ago that finding effective natural cleaners felt like a challenge. But not anymore. These days, there are plenty of companies making safe, effective cleaning products without the toxic ingredients that we are trying to avoid.

These are the kinds of products we want to prioritize in our homes. I'll share some of my favorite brands with you, but these are. If these aren't available where you live.

Look for similar options from a trusted local source. If you're feeling up for it, or if you're working with a budget, you can absolutely make your own cleaning products at home.

It's simple, cost effective, and surprisingly effective. There are tons of great ideas online. Just search for DIY

household cleaning recipes to get started when it comes to laundry.

Many of the safer brands I mentioned also make great detergents, so you're likely covered there. Fabric softeners, though, are a different story. There really aren't any truly nontoxic off the shelf options.

Fortunately, there are some simple, simple alternatives. Wool dryer balls are an easy and effective way to keep your clothes soft, and adding a bit of baking soda to the wash can help, too.

If you're using dryer sheets to prevent static cleaning, a great substitute is a crumpled ball of aluminum foil tossed in the dryer with your clothes.

It helps reduce static and keeps things separated. Also, try not to overdraw your laundry, since that's what creates most of the static in the first place.

Stopping the dryer when the clothes are about 90 to 95% dry lets the remaining moisture air dry and helps cut down on clean and if possible, line dryer synthetic fabrics since they're more likely to cause static drying.

Only natural fabric fabrics in the machine can also make a big difference when it comes to dusting. Doing it more often definitely helps. But just as important is how you dust.

Rather than using feather dusters, which tend to just move the dust around. Up for a damp cloth. This method, called wet dusting, is simple and effective.

Just use a cloth lightly dampened with water to pick up the dust, then toss it in the laundry to reuse it. The goal is to actually remove the dust and chemicals in it from your home, not just stir it up and let it settle again.

Vacuuming more frequently can also make a big difference, even if it's not the most exciting task. And if you really want to up your game, using a vacuum with a Hepa filter is ideal.

Many of the chemicals in household dust are tiny, too small for a standard vacuum to catch. A Hepa filter helps trap those particles so they don't get blown right back into the air.

We'll talk more about Hepa filters next week. I know today's session was a lot to take in, but I hope it's clear that you can have a clean, healthy home without relying on harsh chemicals.

Ozone Laundry and Closing Remarks

What clean means is personal, but it definitely doesn't need to be need to mean hospital level disinfection by choosing safe for personal care products and cleaning products, you'll reduce the toxic load in your home and in your house and in your house.

Dust. And that's exactly the kind of clean we're aiming for. Also, on a final note, there is a natural and innovative option to consider when it comes to doing laundry.

Washing your clothes with ozone instead of detergent. There's a company called O3 waterworks, which offers a system that allows you to clean your laundry using ozone aided water.

Ozone is a powerful, naturally occurring gas created by passing an electrical current through oxygen. It's a strong antimicrobial agent that helps break down dirt, odors, and bacteria without the need for chemical detergents.

If you're looking to reduce the number of products and residues in your home, this is a great solution to explore. You can learn more at O3 waterworks.com.

Thank you for tuning in to Doctor Talks. We hope today's episode has enlightened and inspired you on your path to optimal health. Each day is a new opportunity to make choices that empower your well-being.

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