

# What to Inspect When Expecting

a handy health checklist  
for pregnancy

by Amy Linn



**T**alk about a double-whammy. Pregnancy is not only the most critical time for establishing a new baby's well-being, it's also the time when mom is especially vulnerable to the stew of harmful chemicals in the world; toxins that are increasingly making their way into women's bodies, wombs and breast milk.

The good news is that mom can take care of herself and her coming little one simply by practicing a few of these 10 steps. Making a vow now of progress, not perfection, ensures a good beginning.

## 1. Say yes to organic food

Switching to more organic foods will reduce the whole family's exposure to pesticides, hormones, antibiotics, nitrites and more. Going natural also provides super-nutrients that can help reduce cancer risks and boost overall health. Plus, babies *en utero* tend to develop a fondness for the things mom eats during pregnancy, establishing healthier eating habits for life.

Admittedly, a totally organic lifestyle can be pricey. It's best to buy organic versions of the foods we eat most. Use organic, low-fat dairy and buy organic varieties of the produce with the highest loads of insecticides, including peaches, apples, sweet bell peppers, celery, nectarines, strawber-

ries, cherries, lettuce, imported grapes, pears, spinach and potatoes. (See [Food-News.org/walletguide.php](http://Food-News.org/walletguide.php).) Organic ketchup offers the added benefit of the ultra-healthy antioxidant, lycopene.

*Five-cent solution:* Replace one more item on the shopping list with its organic counterpart on each trip to the grocer's.

## 2. Beauty without chemicals

Choose natural or organic personal care products, including shampoos and conditioners, soaps, deodorants, perfumes, makeup and moisturizers. Conventional brands of cosmetics and lotions often contain noxious chemicals like phthalates, which have been linked to birth defects. A simple way to avoid exposure is to shun products that list fragrance as an ingredient.

In the hair and nail department, avoid hair dyes and nail polishes with toxic components, such as coal tar or formaldehyde. Instead, choose green products at the local natural food store, or shop online at Aubrey Organics, Burt's Bees, Terressentials, Jason Natural and similar sites. (Visit [TheGreenGuide.com](http://TheGreenGuide.com) and [CosmeticsDatabase.com](http://CosmeticsDatabase.com).)

*Five-cent solution:* Instead of slathering on makeup, take advantage of that mother-to-be glow.

## 3. Cotton to organic cotton

By some estimates, conventional cotton accounts for 10 percent of the world's pesticide use and 25 percent of insecticide use, making it one of the most toxic crops on earth. Help weave a healthier world by buying organic cotton towels, linens, mattress pads, encasements and mattresses. Newborns sleep about 12 hours a day, with their little noses, eyes and mouths pressed against the bedding. Find green bedding at The Organic Mattress Store, The Natural Sleep Store, Good Night Naturals and others.

*Five-cent solution:* At a minimum, wash conventional linens in nontoxic laundry products.

## 4. Furnish wisely

Avoid furnishings using polyurethane foam, which is often treated with toxic fire retardants called PBDEs (polybrominated diphenyl ethers). Take a pass on those cute foam chairs for children, too. As the foam ages, it breaks down and releases PBDEs into the air, which eventually wind up in

bodies and breast milk.

*Five-cent solution:* Shop at secondhand stores for lower prices on good products that have had time to off-gas nasty fumes.

## 5. Meet the new-old rules

Don't smoke cigarettes, drink alcohol, use illicit drugs, guzzle caffeinated drinks or clean the kitty litter. Cat feces can contain an organism called toxoplasma, which is particularly hazardous for pregnant women and can, in rare cases, present problems for the fetus. Avoid touching the face while gardening and always wash up afterward, in case cats also are dirtying the soil.

*Five-cent solution:* Ask others to clean the cat box, or wear rubber gloves.

## 6. Shun mercury

At all costs, avoid eating fish high in mercury, a potent neurotoxin known to cause developmental and health problems for fetuses and children under the age of 6. Common high-mercury fish include king mackerel, marlin, orange roughy, shark, swordfish, tilefish and tuna (big-eye or ahi). Limit intake of bluefish, grouper, Chilean sea bass, canned albacore tuna, yellowfin tuna and Spanish and gulf mackerel. Also watch out for sushi, which has murky status in the mercury arena. (See recommendations at [www.mbayaq.org/cr/SeafoodWatch/web/sfw\\_regional.aspx](http://www.mbayaq.org/cr/SeafoodWatch/web/sfw_regional.aspx))

*Five-cent solution:* Fish contains beneficial protein and omega-3 fatty acids, so don't give it up entirely. Aim for safer options, such as shrimp, salmon, pollock and catfish.

## 7. Let bugs and weeds be

Pregnancy is no time to come into contact with pesticides or insecticides, which researchers have linked to cancer, reproductive problems and a host of other health and environmental issues. Pesticides, such as organochlorines (OC), accumulate in the food chain. Some, like DDT, now largely banned in the United States, remain in the environment for decades.

*Five-cent solution:* Switch to natural alternatives, such as fly paper, bug swatters and hand-weeding.

## 8. Pick healthy pans

Teflon pans are easy to clean, but they're manufactured with chemicals like perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA), a water contaminant and suspected carcinogen that may also cause birth defects. Use non-Teflon pans with a splash of olive oil, instead.

*Five-cent solution:* Shop secondhand for cast iron, glass or stainless steel pans.

## 9. Renovate later

Pregnancy may seem like a fine time to fix up the house. But it's actually the worst time, with all the ripping, scraping, gluing, sanding and painting that renovations entail. Remodeling can be particularly toxic in homes built before 1978, when almost all paints contained lead, a substance that can affect nearly every aspect of fetal development. (Test for lead with a kit from the local hardware store.) Most of today's commercial paints still contain hazardous volatile organic compounds (VOC), but paints with few or no VOCs are available. Older houses also are prime territory for asbestos, a fire retardant, widely used in everything from ceilings and plumbing to insulation and flooring. If puttering is a must, at least use green, natural products.

*Five-cent solution:* Resist the redo and relax. Baby won't arrive criticizing the wall color.

## 10. If it stinks, it stinks

When something smells terrible, it's often terrible for us, too. The nose knows when to stay as far away as possible. Common toxins include cigarette and cigar smoke, bleaches, conventional household cleansers, refinery smoke, solvents, paints, paint thinners, glues, oven cleaners, air fresheners, vinyl shower curtains and new carpets (that "new carpet smell" is a bad sign). See a warning label on a product? Leave it alone.

*Five-cent solution:* Feel free to be unapologetically picky in making healthy choices.

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