

## Our Role in Educating Patients About Chemical Exposure

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### Our Role in Educating Patients About Chemical Exposure by Alana Anderson

Toxic load is a term that describes the accumulation of toxins and chemicals in our bodies. It is a term I am hearing more and more in popular culture, which means our patients are hearing it as well. As healthcare professionals, it is important that we inform ourselves about exposure to chemicals and toxins, especially during pregnancy and infancy so we are better able to answer the questions our patients might have.

Chemicals and toxins are impossible to avoid in our world; we ingest them through our environment, food, water, personal care and beauty items, and our household cleaning products. Studies have shown that an unborn fetus will absorb some toxins that are present in their mother's body, and some chemicals have been found in expressed breastmilk. Babies and children risk higher rates of chemical exposure because they often play on the ground or floor and explore the world by placing many things in their mouths.



Some of these chemicals have been linked to miscarriage, birth defects, preterm birth, low birth weight, learning difficulties, childhood and adult cancers, endocrine disruption, hormone disruption, and reproductive toxicity. Unfortunately, while there are studies that link these items together, the science in this area is way behind, and it is difficult to pinpoint true cause and effect.

With so much information swirling around, sometimes leaving more questions than answers, it is easy to become overwhelmed by the magnitude of the problem. Of course, if we are feeling this way, it is no wonder that our patients are filled with anxiety and questions about reducing their toxin exposure. The good news is, there are some very simple things we can advise our patients on to help alleviate their concerns.



Advise patients to drink filtered drinking water, avoid cooking pans with non-stick coatings, avoid having clothes dry cleaned, and avoid storing or heating foods in plastic containers, opting instead for glass. Most household surfaces can be cleaned with baking soda and vinegar rather than harsh chemical cleansers.

We can also advise our patients to reference the Environmental Working Group's (EWG) Guide to Healthy Cleaning and Skin Deep Cosmetic Database guide to personal care products. We can advise patients to read product labels and avoid items that contain parabens, phthalates, BPA, oxybenzone, and triclosan, as well as opting for items that are fragrance free.



Finally, we can encourage our patients to optimize the health of the organs our body uses to filter chemicals when exposed such as our skin, kidneys, colon, and liver. This can be as simple as drinking plenty of filtered water, eating a nutrient dense diet, ensuring a bowel movement at least daily, and limiting or excluding alcohol.

While it is easy to become anxious and excessively worried about chemical exposure, it is important that we help our patients remain calm, and realize they cannot avoid exposure to all chemicals, and we don't need to, as not all chemicals are harmful. Rather than becoming overwhelmed by thinking of everything at once, advise patients to focus on one or two simple swaps that can reduce their adverse chemical exposure at a time. Once they have made these swaps a routine, then they can begin tackling others.

Arming ourselves and our patients with information and resources about chemicals and toxins and their potential health effects can go a long way to reducing anxiety and improving health for the families we serve.

**References:**

- [American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. \(2022\). Toxic Chemicals: steps to stay safer before and during pregnancy.](#)
- [Global News. \(2018\). What is toxic load and how does it affect us?](#)
- [American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. \(2021\). Anxiety and pregnancy.](#)

**Resources:**

- [MothertoBaby.org](https://mothertobaby.org)

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