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the green nest

natural solutions for home cleaning

By Mary Dixon Lebeau

As my little sister, my college roommate, and anyone else who ever shared space with me could attest, I was never one to worry about clutter. But, of course, that attitude changed as I neared the end of each of my five pregnancies. After two trimesters of feeling sick and tired, I was treated to a burst of energy—and a focus when it came to cleaning my home. I wanted walls re-painted, clutter cleared, bills and papers tucked into files and that ugly gunk gone from between the bathroom tiles.

Your nesting instincts are right. A clean house is certainly good for a newborn. But how can you satisfy the urge to prepare your nest for the impending birth of your young, and still stay safe from common household toxins or other risks?

If you read the labels of the cleaning products in your local grocery store, you'll find that many solutions are made with a plethora of chemicals with names we cannot pronounce, and affects we have yet to study suffi-

ciently. One thing we do know is that cleaning solvents, which can release volatile organic compounds (or VOCs) into the air even while they're stored, often cause respiratory problems and even asthma.

According to the March of Dimes, pregnant women should read labels carefully and avoid products (such as some oven cleaners) that are labeled toxic. Other products, such as those containing ammonia or chlorine, may have odors that trigger nausea in pregnant women, though they are unlikely to do any harm to the unborn baby. To avoid fumes, women should open windows and doors to allow for the best ventilation, and wear rubber gloves while cleaning. Ammonia and chlorine products should never be mixed, because the combination of fumes is dangerous for anyone.

Of course, an easier alternative—and one highly recommended by Mindful Mama—is to choose safe, natural products for your cleaning needs. You can make simple cleaning solutions at home, or you can purchase

pregnancy-friendly “green” cleaning solutions. Keep in mind, however, that not every product on your grocer’s shelf boasting “green” or “environmentally friendly” is necessarily free of dangerous or questionable chemicals.

In fact, according to evaluations from the Consumer Union, an independent research group that investigates marketing claims, many terms on product labels are absolutely meaningless. These terms include “eco safe,” “environmentally friendly,” and “green.” There are no standards applied to the accuracy of such claims, and many companies are suddenly turning “green” to attract an audience.

How can you assure your products are truly green—and safe? The easiest way is to make your own, using simple, basic ingredients, such as white vinegar, baking soda, olive oil and borax. These will save you shopping time, money and a lot of worry. But let’s face it, many of us already have too much on our plates. Making our own cleaning products would be just another chore to add to an already too-long list. Another problem—most home recipes aren’t as strong or abrasive as we’d like, so they

may require more elbow grease and more time than their commercial counterparts.

Most of us rely on the convenience of commercially made products, and as responsible pregnant mamas, we like to shop cautiously and make wise choices. Unfortunately, full disclosure of ingredients is not required by law at this time. We recommend choosing products from companies which are specific about their claims. The more information a company is willing to share, the safer you’ll feel about using their products.

To satisfy your nesting urges, and remain safe from chemicals and other irritants, stock your cleaning shelves with products that are environmentally safe and mama-to-be friendly. Our favorites?

A phosphate and chlorine-free dish gel, such as **BioKleen Automatic Dish Gel**, leaves the glasses and dishes sparkling without the chemical residue.



A vegetable-based tub and tile cleaner, like **Naturally Clean Tub and Tile**, breaks down that gunky bathroom grime into natural elements. Even the packaging is eco-friendly.



A trusty all-purpose cleaner, **Mrs. Meyers Lemon Verbena All Purpose Cleaner**, cuts through grease without the help of toxic chemicals or offensive heavy fumes.



An environmentally responsible, heavy duty sponge. Our pick? **The Euro Sponge by Twist** works wonders on your dirt, but is totally biodegradable. The box even turns into a bird feeder!

With the help of these products—and maybe even your significant other—you can guarantee the nest will be fresh and sparkling clean for baby, and you won’t have any worries about chemicals or toxins. When you’re heading into parenthood, the less you have to worry about, the better!

According to **Green Seal**, an independent nonprofit organization that developed comprehensive standards for environmentally friendly cleaning products, these are the problematic ingredients to avoid:

Chlorine bleach irritates the lungs and eyes; forms a potentially deadly gas when mixed with ammonia

Ammonia irritates lungs and eyes

Corrosives can burn skin, cause internal burns if ingested, and explode if used incorrectly. These include phosphoric acid, hydrochloric acid, lye and sulfuric acid

Phosphates can cause algae to bloom in lakes when released into the environment

Petroleum Products are linked to health problems



Healthy Pregnancy, Healthy Baby with Hemp

EFA's During Pregnancy:

It is now estimated that approximately 90% of Americans are deficient in Essential Fatty Acids (EFAs), specifically Omega-3. While everyone requires sufficient levels of EFAs for wellbeing, this is absolutely critical during pregnancy, as both the mother and the unborn baby require 29%-57% more of these “good fats”. EFAs must be obtained through the diet, as the body cannot manufacture them on its own, hence the word “essential”. Throughout pregnancy, the growing fetus uses EFAs from foods the mother eats. However, if there is not enough in the diet, the fetus will take from the mother’s reserve.

Omega-3:

There are two types of EFAs: Omega-3 and Omega-6. During pregnancy, Omega-3 is needed for proper fetal development of the brain, eyes, nervous system, and immune system. If the woman and fetus do not get enough, the nervous system and immune system may never fully develop. This can translate into ongoing behavior, learning and immune disorders. In addition, a deficiency of Omega-3 in the mother increases her risk of premature birth, low birth weight, and post-partum depression.

Omega-6:

Omega-6, specifically in the form of Gamma-Linolenic Acid (GLA), assists in the prevention of pregnancy-induced high blood pressure, otherwise known as Preeclampsia. This disorder affects 10% of pregnant women, and often occurs in the second part of pregnancy. It’s characterized by swelling in the hands, ankles and legs. In severe cases blood clotting can occur, which could result in stroke.

Hemp:

The EFA profile in hemp provides both Omega-3 and Omega-6 in the exact ratios the human body requires at 3:1 Omega-6 to Omega-3. This is truly significant, as Omega-3 only occurs in only a handful of foods. For instance, fish contains Omega-3, yet the mother and her baby can face the risk of mercury toxicity. As for Omega-6, it is relatively easy to obtain enough Omega-6 in a typical diet, yet the Omega-6 GLA found in hemp is also only found in a limited number of food sources. GLA is not found in fish. Furthermore, Hemp also contains chlorophyll, which has an excellent cleansing effect on the body. Overall, Hemp provides an excellent source of balanced EFAs, and can ultimately assist in having happy, healthy babies and mothers.

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