

Good chemistry is not always enough

9 good habits for pregnant and breast-feeding women - on chemicals in cosmetics, baby care products and toys.

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Good chemistry for you and your child

One day you are not allowed to use sunscreen lotion. The next day it is cheese and chocolate you should avoid, and the week after it is okay to use sunscreen lotion after all. When you are pregnant you are constantly advised on what to do and what not to do. The advices are well-intentioned, but as an ordinary person with an average memory, it can be difficult to know which advice to follow.

As a pregnant woman or a new mother you want to do your best for your child. But it is difficult to find your way through the world of chemicals. There is a myriad of advices, some better than others, and only very few people can understand the long product declaration on a shampoo bottle. As a consumer you might be a little confused – perhaps even frustrated.

One thing is certain: chemicals are everywhere. They are used to clean your clothes, to ensure your creams and lotions don't go off, to make your shampoo smell nice and many other things. Most chemicals make our lives so much more comfortable - without harming us - that it would be hard to live without them. But when you are pregnant or breast-feeding, you and your child are particularly vulnerable. Some chemicals may affect your hormone balance or cause allergies. And your child is particularly exposed, because even a small amount of chemicals can have serious effects on a small child. Therefore, you have to be particularly aware of the chemicals to which you expose yourself and your child when you are pregnant and breast-feeding.

The Danish EPA has listed nine good habits for pregnant and breast-feeding women concerning chemicals in cosmetics, baby care products and toys. You can read about the habits in this folder. And if you follow these habits, you will be well on your way to creating good chemistry between you and your child.

1

Use as little cosmetics and lotions as possible during your pregnancy and when you are breast-feeding.

When you use creams, lotions and cosmetics, the chemicals in these products are absorbed by your body. If you are pregnant or breast-feeding, the chemicals may also be given to your child either through blood (if you are pregnant) or through breast milk (if you are breast-feeding).

Chemical substances in cosmetics, creams and lotions are, for instance, preservatives, dyes and perfumes. Some of these chemical substances cause allergies or are suspected of being endocrine disruptors, i.e. they may disrupt your hormone balance. On www.babykemi.dk there is a list of some of the substances we know are allergenic, or which are suspected of being endocrine disruptors.

All cosmetics, creams and lotions must be provided with a declaration of contents, so that you can see if they contain some of these chemical substances. However, a somewhat easier rule of thumb is to minimise your consumption of cosmetics, creams and lotions, so you limit the amount of chemicals in your body and the chemicals' impacts on your child.

2

Always choose unscented products, and don't wear perfume during your pregnancy and when you are breast-feeding

If you wear perfume or scented products on your skin during your pregnancy and when you are breast-feeding, you and your child can be affected. Perfume can cause allergic reactions such as skin irritation, rashes or breathing difficulties. Several Danish surveys show a large increase in perfume allergy in the population, and once your child becomes allergic, the allergy will not go away. This means that you must be particularly careful with perfume if you are already allergic yourself. Perfume is normally described as parfum, aroma or fragrance in the product declaration on the various products. Furthermore, 26 allergenic perfumes exist at present which must be named in the product declaration if they are a part of the product. You can see a list of these on www.babykemi.dk, but the easiest thing to do - and the best solution for you and your child - is to buy unscented creams, lotions and cosmetics and not wear perfume during your pregnancy and when you are breast-feeding.

3

Buy eco-labelled products when possible - look for the Swan label (Nordic eco-label) and the Flower label (European eco-label)

The Swan and the Flower are eco-labels found on products which take special account of the environment and health. The eco-labelled products must fulfil stricter requirements than required by legislation with regard to the use of chemicals, and therefore they put least pressure on the environment. You can find eco-labels on cosmetics, creams and lotions for children as well as adults, washing powder, cleaning agents and clothes. Before long, you will also be able to buy eco-labelled toys. Eco-labelled products must not only fulfil requirements on fewer and less harmful chemicals, they also need to fulfil the high quality requirements that products have to function properly. When you buy eco-labelled products, you buy products of good quality which at the same time protect you and your child from harmful chemicals. You can find a list of the many eco-labelled products on www.ecolabel.dk.

4

Don't dye your hair during your pregnancy and when you are breast-feeding

Hair dye contains chemicals which can cause serious allergic reactions. The substance resorcinol, which is found in some hair dyes, is on an EU list of endocrine disruptors, which you can see on www.babykemi.dk. Permanent hair dye is also suspected of causing cancer of the bladder. The chemicals in the dye can be absorbed by the body and can therefore be transferred to your child if you are pregnant or breast-feeding. Also 'natural hair dye', such as Henna, may contain substances with harmful effects. At present there are no hair dyes which don't contain problematic chemicals. Therefore, it is best to avoid hair dye altogether during your pregnancy and when you are breast-feeding.

5

Avoid using products in spray cans, and don't paint during your pregnancy and when you are breast-feeding

If you use aerosol sprays or paint, you inhale vapours and tiny particles with chemicals, including organic solvents. The chemicals can be absorbed by your body and in this way be transferred to your child. Products in aerosol cans include hairspray, aerosol deodorants, impregnation of for example leather, spray paint etc. It is often relatively easy to find alternatives. You can for example use a deodorant stick or a roll-on and hair products in solid form. Again the unscented and eco-labelled products are the most gentle products for you and your baby.

You can also find liquid impregnation for footwear and for impregnation of your clothes in the washing machine. There are no types of paint available which don't emit vapours - not even the water-based paints! Therefore, avoid painting in this period, and don't have your child's bedroom painted in the last week before it has to sleep in it. It is not good for your child to breathe in the vapours from newly painted walls. Leave the windows open, if a room has been painted it may take several weeks before the smell of paint is completely gone.

6

Wash everything before using it for your baby - also clothes and toys made of fabric and plastic.

New clothes may contain chemicals which can be absorbed through the skin. However, if you wash the clothes before you dress your baby in them, most chemicals will disappear. Toys made of fabric and plastic and other items of plastic, such as dummies and feeding bottles, may - when new - contain chemical residues on the surface, including substances which are suspected of being endocrine disruptors, i.e. they disrupt your hormone balance. If you wash plastic items in hot clean water before you give them to your baby, many of the chemicals will disappear. You can also choose feeding bottles made of glass. Most toys made of fabric can be washed, if not in the washing machine then under the tap. In this way you minimise the chemical impacts on your baby.

7

Avoid daily use of lotions, soap, etc. on your baby

Your baby doesn't need creams, lotions, soap, oil, shampoo etc. every day. In fact, these care products may, in the long run, have an impact on your baby, because even if the products are targeted for children and babies, there is no guarantee that they have fewer problematic chemicals in them. For instance, many moist baby towelettes contain perfume as well as preservatives. If you don't use moist towelettes and ointment every time you change a nappy, and avoid using shampoo, soap, creams and lotions every time you bathe your baby, you will minimise the risk of allergic reactions. Bathe your baby in water without soap, and avoid creams, lotions and oils after the bath. Skip ointment and lotion when you change a nappy, and instead use a washcloth with lukewarm water. If you now and again use care products for your baby, use eco-labelled and unscented products, and wait with the shampoo until your child has a good head of hair! If your child's skin is very dry or red and irritated or if your child has other skin problems, consult your general practitioner or your health visitor.

8

Always buy unscented products for your baby - including toys

Perfume and other fragrances may be allergenic for your child. The allergy can result in skin irritation, skin rashes and breathing difficulties. Care products - also for babies - often contain perfume, but luckily there are many perfume-free products on the market, which are usually easy to find on the supermarket shelves. If you buy baby-care products with the Swan label, you are guaranteed that they are perfume-free. It is different with toys which can also contain perfume or other fragrances. In this situation it may be difficult to read on the package whether perfume has been added to the toys. Smell the toy before you buy it, if possible, and avoid toys which smell of perfume. If you cannot smell the toy because it is in a box, ask in the shop where you buy the toy, if it is without fragrance.

9

Use only toys which are intended for babies. Toys for children over 3 years of age may contain phthalates.

Phthalates are used to soften plastic and can be absorbed by the human body when they are in contact with the skin or when breathed in. Some phthalates are endocrine disruptors, and therefore, in Denmark, they have been banned in toys for children under 3 years of age. However, phthalates may be found in toys for older children. Babies don't distinguish between toys for them and toys for older children, and very often they happily put most toys in the mouth. Therefore, they should only be given toys intended for babies – that is without phthalates. The label on the toy must state for which age group it is intended, so you can easily see if the toy is suitable for babies.

A special kind of toy is modelling wax which can contain large amounts of phthalates. Therefore, most of the modelling wax you can buy - particularly that you can bake in the oven - is only allowed for children over 8 years of age.

In January 2007 some phthalates were also banned in toys for children over 3 years of age. On www.babykemi.dk you can see which substances have been banned.

9 good habits

Pregnant and breast-feeding women:

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- 1** Use as little cosmetics and lotions as possible during your pregnancy and when you are breast-feeding
- 2** Always choose unscented products, and don't wear perfume during your pregnancy and when you are breast-feeding
- 3** Buy eco-labelled products when possible - look for the Swan label and the Flower label
- 4** Don't dye your hair during your pregnancy and when you are breast-feeding
- 5** Avoid using products in spray cans, and don't paint during your pregnancy and when you are breast-feeding

Babies:

Good chemistry for your baby

- 6** Wash everything before using it for your baby – also clothes and toys made of fabric and plastic
- 7** Avoid daily use of lotions, soap, etc. on your baby every day
- 8** Always buy unscented products for your baby - including toys
- 9** Only use toys intended for babies. Toys for children over 3 years of age may contain phthalates

For further information and articles on good chemistry for pregnant and breast-feeding women see: www.babykemi.dk

For dietary guidelines for pregnant women see the Danish Veterinary and Food Administration website: www.fvst.dk

For list of eco-labelled products, see Ecolabelling Denmark (Danish Standards Association) website: www.ecolabel.dk

Downside to good chemistry

Chemicals are a part of our everyday-lives, however some chemicals can affect very young children in particular.

In this folder you can read about the Danish Environmental Protection Agency's 9 good habits for pregnant and breastfeeding women on cosmetics, baby care products and toys. There is more information on www.babykemi.dk.

