

10 Things Depleting Your Life Force

Protect your life force on a cellular level.

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November 4, 2015

All sorts of toxins, from chemical and electric pollution to pharmaceutical drugs, assault your mitochondria—the powerhouses of your cells—and create dysfunction. This leads to DNA damage, tissue deterioration, and organ impairment—and that means impairment of any organ, because every cell is connected to every other cell. Thousands of studies have now been published on mitochondria and the abnormal mitochondrial dynamics involved in diseases like Alzheimer's and Parkinson's, autoimmune conditions, diabetes, obesity, cancer, heart disease, migraine headaches, chronic fatigue syndrome, and even aging itself.

More than 50 million people in the United States are said to be affected by conditions involving mitochondrial dysfunction.

As a young cardiologist, I was surprised to learn that widely used everyday substances in the environment are toxic to the heart and can deplete the Vital Force. (Vital Force is also known as "life force" or the energy that flows within us.) The very first case I encountered involved a young man (he was my own age at the time, 32!) who developed a wild, life-threatening arrhythmia while painting a windowless room in his house.

It turned out that the paint was the toxin threatening his life! It was touch-and-go for more than a day before we finally pulled him out of the lethal arrhythmia and into a normal heart rhythm. I'll never forget that case. It opened my awareness to a source of trouble that cardiologists-to-be weren't taught about in medical school: There are toxins we encounter every single day that disrupt our bodies' functioning. The potential is real and, often, something right under your nose.

In fact, according to the American Academy of Environmental Medicine, there are some 90,000 chemicals commonly circulating in our lives, with perhaps 10 to 15 percent of us believed to be reactive to one thing or another, even natural substances.

Over the years, it became obvious to me that anybody can be reactive to almost anything in the environment—food, pesticides, solvents, mold, airborne particulates, air fresheners, and, of course, the

medications doctors use to treat symptoms—and that reactions are extremely individual. One person may have an allergic reaction, another might develop fatigue or a headache, and another an arrhythmia.

Acute exposures aside, doctors specializing in environmental illness often talk about the "total load" of environmental stressors, or insults, that result in symptoms. Think of your immune system as a barrel with a specific capacity. That capacity can shrink or enlarge depending on your toxic exposure at a given time, whether to physical toxins or to toxic psychological stress. You may or may not be aware of the specific toxins filling up your barrel and only know that something is wrong when the barrel spills over and you develop symptoms.

Some time ago, I developed a list of what I consider the most toxic substances in our daily lives. I share them with you here, along with the same advice I gave to my patients. You obviously can't dodge all of these bullets. We live in a sea of chemicals. But do try to avoid or minimize exposure to as many of them as you can in order to keep your barrel from spilling over.

Here is a list of the **10 common toxins we encounter in everyday living** and, in my opinion, how to avoid them.

#1. Pesticides

Many of our fruits and vegetables are sprayed with pesticides, and we end up ingesting the residues. To avoid pesticides and other additives in food, eat washed organic produce. Researchers have found that organic fruits and vegetables are much, much lower in pesticide residue, and perhaps are higher in natural antioxidants, compared with nonorganic produce.



Avoid using toxic pesticide products in your home and yard, too, and seek out other, more natural solutions for pest control. An example: A mixture of ¼ cup of lemon juice, 1 tablespoon of vanilla extract, and 15 drops of lavender oil, along with enough water to fill a 16-ounce spray bottle, makes a superior mosquito repellent.

#2. Prescription Drugs

Citing the Institute of Medicine, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) states that each year, more than 2 million adverse drug reactions (ADRs) occur, and these reactions account for 100,000 annual deaths, making



ADRs the "fourth leading cause of death." ADRs are largely preventable, and side effects often compound the original problem drugs are taken for.

Unfortunately, side effects are often dismissed by doctors and grossly underreported. Many pharmaceutical drugs are mitochondrial-toxic and can deplete the body of nutrients, which is something that doctors never tell you. Many drugs are too strong. Often, natural alternatives can help get at the underlying causes of chronic problems and minimize or eliminate risky medication usage.

These alternatives include eating organic, nutritious food; taking nutritional supplements; engaging in regular exercise; and following a good stress-reduction method.

However, if you want to stop taking a drug or ease back on it, always consult your doctor first.

#3. Alcohol

Moderate intake—one drink daily for a woman, two for men—may have therapeutic value, but imbibing more than that is asking for trouble. Liver destruction and nutritional deficiencies are among the many possible consequences of heavy drinking.



Excess alcohol causes nutritional deficiencies. Alcohol breaks down into aldehyde, a substance that damages cellular membranes and causes premature aging.

#5. Cigarette Smoke

Smoking is a cardinal sin against health. Lung cancer aside, this habit is the most destructive for the heart and nearly every other organ in the body. Each puff carries a toxic payload of chemicals and carcinogens, including nicotine (used as a natural pesticide for hundreds of years), carbon monoxide, ammonia, arsenic, cadmium, lead, and formaldehyde, to name just a few of the 600 ingredients.



#4. Indoor and Outdoor Pollution

Air pollution is no joke; it does damage to cells and organs over time. Use an air purifier, at least in the rooms where you spend the most time, to reduce dust and other particulate matter. Install a water-filter system to purify the beverage your body needs the most: water. Be aware of sensitivities to outdoor chemicals,



pollen, and mold. Don't walk, jog, or bike in the city during rush hour.

If you smoke and recognize that you need to stop, seek help through your physician or a credible smoking-cessation program.

#6. Formaldehyde

This chemical is also used in the production of fertilizer, paper, plywood, particleboard, and urea-formaldehyde resins; as a preservative in some foods; and in many products used around the house, such as paints, antiseptics, medicines, cosmetics, furniture, carpets, and cabinetry. Formaldehyde can irritate the skin, throat, nose, and eyes; high-level exposure, most commonly related to the resins industry, is linked to some cancers.



In 2006, the International Agency for Research on Cancer, a branch of the World Health Organization, classified formaldehyde as a "known human carcinogen," and the U.S. government followed suit in 2011.

The primary way you can be exposed to formaldehyde is by breathing air containing it. Open windows to bring fresh air indoors. Also, reduce your dependency on dry cleaning, since the process used to keep clothes wrinkle free often involves the use of a formaldehyde resin. Air out any clothes or other products that may have been exposed to formaldehyde.

#7. Personal-hygiene products

We smear and spray our skin with all sorts of creams, sunscreens, lotions, soaps, perfumes, and what-not.

The best strategies are to opt for natural products whenever possible and to use personal care products minimally because what goes on the skin also can go into the skin...and into the body.



That means multiple chemicals. Most deodorants, for instance, contain aluminum to prevent perspiration; aluminum is known to cause DNA alterations, and daily dermal exposure may, over time, lead to breast cancer.

Another example is antibacterial soap, in either bar or liquid form. Americans scoop up nearly \$1 billion worth of these products a year, even though studies show they are no more effective than regular

soap and water at reducing the spread of germs. These products contain two active ingredients—triclocarban and triclosan—that have been found in experiments to disrupt reproductive hormone activity and interfere with cell signaling activities, including in the brain and heart. Buyer beware!

For those personal-care products you can't live without, the Environmental Working Group has established [Skin Deep](#), an online product database through which you can learn about the known chemical toxicity of almost 64,000 cosmetic products. Although labels don't give you all the information you need to decide whether products are safe, reading them carefully is a good place to start. Choose products with the fewest ingredients and chemicals, and *avoid chemical fragrances altogether*.

Good alternatives to perfumes and fragrances are essential oils. For sunscreen, apply zinc oxide. It is the best, safest, and most nonabsorbable sunblock you can use.

#8. Petrochemicals

Surprise! Derivatives of petrochemicals are found in most processed food, personal-care, and cleaning products.

Households are literally brimming with the stuff that has the potential to increase your risks of short- and long-term health issues, including cancer. Try to minimize exposure. For sure, cut down on processed food as much as possible, and eat organic. Be aware that solvents can cause lung and throat irritation, and furniture polish may be flammable and can cause serious injury if accidentally swallowed. (Avoid products, when possible, with the word danger on the label.)



#9. Heavy Metals

Lead from dust, dirt, old house paint, batteries, new toys, and even water flowing through lead-lined pipes can increase the risks of a number of health issues.

The nervous systems of young children and the unborn are most vulnerable. Cadmium is another toxic metal, and exposure can contribute to hypertension, among other things. Cigarette smoke is a common source, but cadmium is also found in batteries, pigments, metal coatings, plastics, and fertilizers. Mercury, one of the most potent mitochondrial toxins, is pervasive in freshwater fish and in large seawater fish, such as shark, tuna, swordfish, orange roughy, large halibut, and grouper. (Check out these [12 fish you should never eat](#).)



#10. Phthalates and Bisphenol A (BPA)

Both of these common compounds, used in plastics, are under ongoing scrutiny because of potential health risks to humans, including reproductive risks. [Phthalates](#) are used in soft plastics; BPA, in hard plastics and food can linings. Both are commonly found in products ranging from cosmetics, soaps, and lotions to food packaging and water bottles.



If you're a dialysis patient, hemophiliac, or blood transfusion recipient, you're at the highest risk of exposure to phthalates through the tubing or containers made with this compound. The FDA recommends certain steps to minimize exposure of patients to medical devices that contain phthalates, including use of alternative devices for certain procedures. Other people at high risk are painters, printers, and workers exposed to phthalates during the manufacture, formulation, and processing of plastics.

Although there are many concerns over potential risks of BPA, the FDA has not banned it and has deemed it safe at low doses. I have seen research describing an association between higher levels of BPA and risks of high blood pressure and coronary artery disease; however, the degree of the chemical's influence on health is far from clear. My advice is to simply reduce your exposure and steer clear of plastic containers whenever you can. Avoid canned foods as much as possible, and drink water out of glass bottles or containers.

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