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an allergen free home

Barbara Hopkins takes a look through the kitchen cupboards to find out whether our homeware products are the cause of rising allergies

Are we harming our children by over-zealous home hygiene? Should they be in a pristine environment, or playing outside in mud and dirt? A new report from Allergy UK found that cases of perennial allergic rhinitis, better known as 'home fever', have risen by more than 10 per cent over the past year. According to the research, at least 12 million Britons are allergic to their own homes. The allergies are triggered by house dust mites and mould, as well as chemical sensitivity to cleaning and laundry products.

dirt is good for you

The increasing use of high potency cleaning products that promise to banish every germ from every surface, are testament to the widely-held belief that we need to exist in a germ-free environment. However, research shows that a certain amount of exposure to dust, germs and dirt are essential for the development and function of healthy immune systems. Vigorous household cleaning is frequently labelled as the culprit for the rise in allergy-related illness, particularly in children. Whilst the research shows that a number of factors may be responsible, there's no doubt that the number of chemicals in our homes is rapidly increasing.

Complementary therapist, Alison Wyndham, founder of The Wyndham Centres in London and Herts, is firmly of the opinion that "the increase in childhood and adult allergies/sensitivities is caused by our toxic environment. We live in a

world of chemicals and our children's immune systems struggle to cope... the liver is under siege daily from toxins and chemicals." This can have a serious effect on children's health. Alison continues: "A weak liver and an underdeveloped immune system can lead to a multitude of health problems including rashes, eczema and even psoriasis, allergies, digestive problems, food allergies, and headaches".

a chemical load

Laundry agents, for example, contain chemicals which are absorbed into the skin, causing free radical damage. Alison goes on to say that "the liver is unable to detoxify the chemicals and the skin tries to release them to avoid damage to the brain and other tissues. The allergic reaction is the body's way of removing the toxins."

There's a vast number of toxins found in our household cleaning agents and some of the most common include parabens. Using acting as a preservative; paraben is often preceded by the prefix methyl-, ethyl-, butyl-, or propyl. Formaldehyde is a preservative used in a wide range of products including furniture polish and cleaners with an aerosol propellant and has been linked to chronic disease. Nonyl phenols are used in laundry detergents and are eye and skin irritants. Phosphoric acid may be toxic to the central nervous system and is found in some liquid dishwasher detergents, metal polishes, some disinfectants, as well as bathroom cleaners, especially those that remove lime and mildew. Sodium Lauryl Sulphate (SLS) is used as a lathering agent. It's a known skin irritant and enhances the allergic response to other toxins and allergens.

Claire Beasant has two children aged five and seven who both suffer from eczema. Claire says: "I have always used my local supermarket's own-brand washing powder, but this seemed to irritate their eczema even more - which resulted in them having to use creams prescribed by the doctor." After trying many different washing powders with no improvement, a friend recommended an organic washing powder from Alma Win. After just one month Claire saw a huge improvement in her children's skin and has almost stopped using the medicated cream. She is confident that their eczema will clear up completely.

clean and green

Rachel Ray had a violent reaction to cleaning products when she became pregnant, vomiting every time she smelt a 'normal' product. Her symptoms disappeared when she switched to natural cleaning materials and this led to Rachel founding her own domestic cleaning business which only uses ecologically sound products.

What can parents do for their children to reduce the likelihood of allergy? Registered General Nurse Jayne Payne works in Sussex. Jayne is seeing a rising trend in children diagnosed with hay fever during the summer months, when there is no previous history of allergy. Jayne feels that alongside home cleaning, lifestyle factors are also influential in the development of allergy. "Children no longer play out of doors," she says. "They are cocooned by technology which keeps them in front of the television or computer, instead of playing outside." >





"By making simple changes in lifestyle we can have a positive impact on our children's immune systems"

reducing the overload

Homoeopath Chris Hyslop emphasises the importance of distinguishing between intolerance and allergy. "Intolerance can turn into allergy," he says, "but the overload on the body's immune system can be reduced." Chris uses the image of a full glass of water: the glass will only overflow when too much is put into it. When referring to allergies this overflow can, for example, be caused by substances which are touched, airborne or eaten. "When the glass overflows," he explains, "the situation becomes like a spiral, where the body's immune response is triggered to react to additional substances or foodstuffs."

Simplifying the food that we eat can remove aggravating factors, allowing the immune system to recover. By starting with raw ingredients and removing or reducing additives and preservatives, the potential is reduced for the glass to overflow. The body can then utilise energy more effectively to fight the allergen. Additionally, simplifying the products used for everyday tasks can make a real difference. Vinegar may be substituted for toilet cleaner and borax

powder (available from chemists) for bleach. Research continues to show that a wide range of factors is increasing the toxic overload on our children's systems, from food additives to chemicals in the home, as well as materials in the home environment. It seems that by making some simple changes in lifestyle and diet we can have a positive impact on our children's immune systems, helping them towards healthier and happier futures.

USEFUL RESOURCES

The NHS website [nhs.uk/livewell](https://www.nhs.uk/livewell) has further guidance on avoiding the chemicals present in everyday products. Allergy UK gives top tips to manage symptoms and reduce indoor allergens in the home: [allergyuk.org](https://www.allergyuk.org)

FURTHER READING

1001 Natural Remedies tinyurl.com/1001natural

Natural Stain Remover: Clean Your Home without Harmful Chemicals tinyurl.com/naturalstain

SOURCE A GREENER CLEAN

There's an increasing array of chemical-free products for the home and laundry:

Earth Friendly Products are the makers of ECOS Laundry Detergent. [greenbrands.co.uk](https://www.greenbrands.co.uk).

- New Zealand's Planet Health have launched their successful Environmental Choice accredited range in the UK. Cleaning agents include coconut, sugar and natural oils. [planethealth.com.au](https://www.planethealth.com.au) or 0800 157 7384.

- Award-winning Violet's Magic Laundry Range (pictured) is guaranteed free from synthetics and does not contain optical brighteners, enzymes, phosphates, petrochemicals or artificial fragrances. The range includes other hypo-allergenic laundry products. [homescents.co.uk](https://www.homescents.co.uk)

- Lilly's Eco-Clean promises to cut the number of products in your cleaning cupboard and can be bought direct from [nappies-direct.com](https://www.nappies-direct.com).

- Popular brand Ecover is now offering its complete range online at: [ecoverdirect.com](https://www.ecoverdirect.com)

- Alma Win Natural Cleanliness is a range of environmentally friendly organic laundry, dishwashing and household cleaning products; all are certified by ECO Garantie. [pravera.co.uk/almawin](https://www.pravera.co.uk/almawin)

- [brightandbeautifulhome.com](https://www.brightandbeautifulhome.com) - Rachel Ray's green domestic cleaning, available in towns across the country



Barbara Hopkins is a freelance writer and editor. She was introduced to the efficacy of homeopathy when her 11-year-old son developed an allergy to house dust