

chemical-free zone

Wendyl Nissen, NZ's Green Goddess, shares with us some of her recipes and tips for a chemical-free home through pregnancy and beyond.

pregnancy

When it comes to clearing chemicals out of the home, there are some issues which specially concern pregnant woman and new babies. It's so important, especially when it comes to exposing babies to the toxins and chemicals in commercial cleaners.

A study in 2005 of maternal and umbilical cord blood provided by volunteers in the Netherlands revealed that known or suspected hazardous substances present in every day household products are entering babies' bodies through the umbilical cord. The chemicals included some which are known to affect physical and mental development in animals. So it makes sense when you are pregnant to clear out any commercial cleaning products which may contaminate your home. It should be a safe haven for that baby developing in your womb.

cleaning products

The main problem with cleaning products is that there is little or no government regulation of them. Unlike food products, there is no legal requirement to label the contents with a list of ingredients, nor is there any regulatory agency which tests products for consumer safety.

Recent years have also been the advent of "greenwashing", which is now commonplace, with manufacturers leading you to believe that their product is green and safe for the planet and your family, when in fact it is anything but. A study in the US last year found that more than 95% of the 5000 consumer products they examined had unproven environmental claims. Of most concern were items claiming to be free of controversial chemicals like BPA and phthalates, especially baby and toy products. Others gave no proof of environmental claims, using vague or poorly defined marketing language, such as "all-natural" and the use of fake labels designed to imply a product had third-party certification or endorsement of its claims. The sad fact is that even if you think you have found a cleaning product which lists the ingredients and seems natural and harmless, you can't be sure.

MY ADVICE: These recipes have all been tried and tested by me, and the many customers who buy my Green Goddess products. They come from old books of hints and tips which my Nana would have read and used. I suggest to people who are about to make the switch that they visit their local bulk food store, and stock up on everything they need at once. It makes it much easier when everything is sitting in your cleaning cupboard waiting for you. None of these recipes takes long to make, but they will save you money and I hope bring you and your new family years of safe satisfaction.

recipe

Baby Laundry Liquid for Pregnancy and Baby clothes

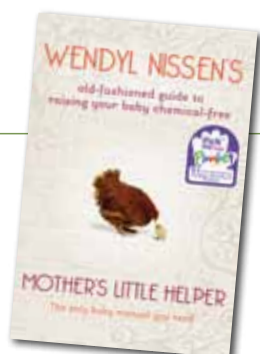
- ½ bar or 70g castile or vegetable-based soap such as Dr Bronner's Baby Mild
- 1.5 litres of water
- ½ cup washing soda
- ¼ cup borax
- 1 litre hot water

Place soap in a saucepan with the first quantity of water and heat on low until soap is dissolved. Stir in washing soda and borax. Stir for a few minutes until thickened and remove from heat. (If you're using castile or vegetable-based soap, it won't thicken straight away, but don't worry, it will thicken overnight in the bottles). Add 1 litre of hot water to a bucket. Pour in the soap mixture and mix well. Top up bucket with another 5 litres of hot water and mix well. Pour into old milk bottles or

other containers and set aside for 24 hours or until mixture thickens. Use half a cup of mixture per load of washing. You may have to squeeze rather than pour from the bottles as it is quite guggy.

Tip: Many people ask if they can use liquid castile soap to make this. No you can't. It needs to be a cake soap.

*When you are no longer pregnant and want an everyday laundry liquid you can use for the rest of the family you can substitute the Baby Mild soap for another of Dr Bronner's soaps or plain old Sunlight soap and also add 20 drops of your favourite essential oil. I think lavender works best.



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bathing your newborn

After putting our newborn babies to our breast, the next thing we usually do is bath them. You may be tempted to scrub all the vernix – that waxy, white coating which covers newborn babies – off with some good old soap. Your baby doesn't need soap. In fact, olive oil does a better job. There are good soaps and then there are very bad ones. Believe me, I've made my own. They are made by combining a fat with a very caustic acid which causes the fat to saponify and form the soap. So some can be quite harsh, and commercial ones have synthetic fragrances and other nasties added into them.

MY ADVICE: Even if you read labels very carefully, you can't be sure what else is lurking in these bath products. And while one product might not be cause for concern, the reality is that babies may be exposed to several products at bath time, such as bath wash, shampoo, conditioner and baby lotion every day, in addition to other chemical exposures in the home.

Fortunately, there are plenty of easy, natural alternatives which are easy to use. Here are some suggestions for what to put in baby's bath.

- Use a very mild, unscented soap, such as Dr Bronner's Baby Mild soap which comes in a cake and liquid form. It is made out of coconut, olive, hemp and jojoba oil.
- Add a few drops of olive oil to the bath water and swish around. When baby is older than 3-months, you can also add one or two drops of lavender oil in their bath at night to relax them for sleep.
- Put half an organic lemon in the bathwater. The astringency of the lemon makes a great cleanser, and it is also anti-bacterial.
- Add one teaspoon of baking soda to make the water super soft and soothing. Especially good if baby has a nappy rash or heat rash.
- Add 20ml of full-fat milk to the bath. The lactic acid in milk is a great cleanser and leaves baby's skin smooth and soft.
- Tie a tablespoon of rolled oats into a piece of cloth the size of a small handkerchief and tie at the top with a piece of string. Add it to the bath 5 minutes beforehand, and just before you pop baby in, give it a squeeze. The oats are very soothing for skin and you can use the sachet to clean your baby with by rubbing gently. Also good for skin rashes.

recipe

Baby Bath Wash

- 400ml water
- 80ml rosewater
- 4 Tbsp grated 100% natural vegetable oil soap – I use Dr Bronner's Baby Mild
- 20ml glycerine
- 10 drops lavender essential oil. (Do not add this for babies under 3-months old.)

Bring the water to the boil in a small saucepan and then add the grated soap. Stir until all the soap is melted, then take off the heat and allow to cool a little, until just warm. Add the rest of the ingredients and pour into a squeeze bottle. Depending on the soap you use, this may cool into a gel or remain quite liquid. Simply squeeze into the bath. It will not bubble but cleans and moisturises baby's skin beautifully.