

Fashion Action

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Protect Children Against Harmful Toxins

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Phthalates are a chemical found in plastics likely littered throughout your child's life. They are pervasive: in the food they eat, in their personal care products, in their clothes, in your household items. This is a concern because phthalates have been found to stay in the human body, and have far-reaching health effects.

As far as Hearts is concerned, ethical fashion is safe and healthy fashion. Though it can sometimes be hard to steer clear of phthalates, once you know where to look and how to avoid them, you can help reduce your exposure – and your child's exposure – to these dangerous chemicals.



What Are Phthalates?

- **10 diseases and disorders linked to phthalates:** Declined reproductive capacity or risk of prostate or testicular cancer in men; in women, increased risk of endometriosis, endocrine or reproductive cancers, impaired ovarian function, or menstrual cycling; and fetal or childhood exposure can cause altered sex differentiation.^[i] Other diseases these chemicals are linked to include Type-2 Diabetes,^[ii] childhood obesity,^[iii] and even ADHD.^[iv]
- **Phthalate exposure in the US is widespread:** Women having a higher toxic load due to increased use of personal care products.^[v] They're used in cosmetics, fragrances, solvents, children's toys, baby equipment, wood finishes, lubricating oils, detergents, and fixatives.^[vi]
- **Children are more vulnerable:** Their bodies are still growing; when they're exposed to endocrine-disrupting chemicals, their entire development can be affected. Boys exposed to high levels are more likely to have undersized testicles and a higher risk of cancer later in life.^[vii]
- **Kids 6-11 have higher phthalate loads than older kids:** This is due to higher likelihood of mouthing behavior, playing on or near the ground, higher food-to-body weight ratio.^[viii]
- **Childhood exposure increases adult disease:** Exposure to phthalates during childhood may increase a person's risk of reproductive cancer or problems later on in life.^[ix]
- **35+ million tons yearly PVC laced with phthalates:** PVC (polyvinyl chloride) is that flexible plastic used in chew toys and backpacks. Phthalates are used as a vinyl softener.^[x] More than 35 million tons of PVC are used each year globally (resulting in toxic **dioxin** production as well).^[xi]

Take Action! Fight Back Against Phthalates

1. **Avoid #1, #3, and #7 plastics:** The "safest" plastics are #2, #4, and #5. Avoid #1, #3, and #7 because of the chance of phthalates leaching. This goes for items meant for your child's food storage, backpacks, clothes, and accessories.
2. **Stay away from fashion made with PVC:** Avoid fashion items with the #3 code or #6 code on them, as that is the symbol for PVC and the code for vinyl polystyrene. The biggest culprits are lunch bags, lunch boxes, and backpacks, although shoes fake leather shoes and other accessories are also made from PVC. The label may even say "vinyl" or you may see "V" or "PVC" under the recycling symbol. For items that don't have a code, learn to recognize **PVC** by sight and by feel: it looks and feels shiny and flexible.
3. **Buy backpacks, lunch boxes, and school supplies made of natural materials:** Natural materials like glass, wood, organic cotton, metal, linen, and bamboo don't contain harmful chemicals. Buy fabric-covered, cardboard, or polypropylene binders. This **PVC-Free School Supplies guide**, produced by the Center of Health, Environment, and Justice should help. [Reusit.com](#) has a great selection of back to school products that are both reusable and safe.
4. **Choose household items that are PVC-free:** Your children crawl around on the floor and furniture, putting them in danger of phthalate exposure if they're made of PVC and other products like that. Vinyl flooring, furniture, and some decor items all contain PVC. Go with wood, bamboo, or flooring made from natural materials. Avoid fake leather furniture and pillows.
5. **Political actions to support safer consumer products:** Tell your local rep that you want more research done into the health hazards posed by exposure to phthalates. You can also demand for the government to ban phthalates in baby and children's items.



Learn More About the Dangers of Phthalates

- Learn more about phthalates and their uses and dangers from the [EPA](#).
- Find out more about types of plastics that are safe and those that are not from [HealthyChild.org's Be Wise With Plastics](#).
- Look into the cancer-phthalates connection with this [Fact Sheet on Phthalates](#).

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