

Reducing exposure to chemicals that can reduce fertility

Before
the baby
Bump



We come across many chemicals every day in the products we use, the food we eat, and the air we breathe. Some of these chemicals, called Endocrine Disrupting Chemicals (EDCs), can harm male and female reproductive health and fertility.

What are Endocrine Disrupting Chemicals (EDCs)?

EDCs are substances found in the air, soil, water, food, and many products we buy. They can interfere with normal body functions, including reproduction. Some EDCs occur naturally like phytoestrogens in soybeans and flaxseeds. But many are man-made. There are over 800 synthetic EDCs in plastics, personal care items, food packaging, and industrial and agricultural processes. How much you are exposed depends on your lifestyle, job, and where you live.

What do EDCs do?

Research shows EDCs can harm reproductive health in men and women by acting like, or blocking, hormones like testosterone and oestrogen.

This can cause:

- Hormone imbalances
- Poor quality sperm and egg
- Damage to sperm DNA
- Longer menstrual cycles
- Delayed pregnancy
- Higher chances of miscarriage

Studies found that 95% of people tested have EDCs in their bodies. People who are infertile often have higher levels. EDC exposure can also happen at work

Common EDCs and their sources

- **Bisphenols (BPA/BPS/BPF)** – Plastics, can linings, glossy receipts
- **Phthalates** – Plastics, toys, food packaging, medical tubing, personal care products
- **Parabens** – Preservatives in food, cosmetics, and personal care products
- **Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs)** – Flame retardants, industrial waste, electrical devices
- **Pesticides/herbicides** – Garden products, sprayed crops
- **Heavy metals** – Air pollution, cigarette smoke, contaminated food, dental fillings, industrial products

How to reduce EDC exposure

While avoiding EDCs entirely is impossible, these tips can help minimise your exposure to harmful chemicals and protect your reproductive health.

- Wash fruits and vegetables well before eating or cooking.
- Choose fresh foods where possible instead of processed, canned, and pre-packaged foods which may contain BPA and phthalates.
- Choose lean meats as chemicals can build up in the animal fat.
- Avoid handling glossy receipts as they are coated with BPA.
- Use glass, stainless steel or hard plastic bottles instead of soft plastic ones.
- Reheat food in glass or porcelain containers. Cover food with paper towel or a porcelain plate instead of plastic wraps.
- Keep your home ventilated to clear chemicals from the air.
- Avoid air fresheners, strong chemicals, and fumes. Use strong chemicals like glues, paints, and varnishes in a well-ventilated area and wear appropriate protective equipment.
- Use non-toxic cleaning and gardening products.
- Read labels on personal care items and choose paraben-free, unscented options.
- Check food labels and avoid additives and preservatives.
- Be cautious of marketing claims like "BPA-free," as replacements like BPS may also be harmful.

Reproduced with kind permission from YourFertility, 2025

Before the Baby Bump is an initiative of the Queensland Government, delivered by Health and Wellbeing Queensland, and funded through Queensland Health's Supporting Healthier Pregnancies Initiative.