FEEL THE LOVE
How Holly Robinson Peete advocates for her son RJ

SENSE
OVERLOAD?
6 coping strategies

TOXIC
WARNING
Deirdre Imus on green products for your ASD teen

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Give autism a chance
Our Children—Our Future

Mom, television star and autism crusader
Holly Robinson Peete with her phenomenal son, RJ
For over a decade, I’ve been writing about harmful chemicals in our environment and how they jeopardize our children’s health and development. We have made significant strides in identifying, controlling and eliminating many toxic exposures but there is still an overwhelming amount of harmful chemicals that go unregulated in the market place and parents continue to be concerned about their safety.

Many of these exposures start in the womb—in 2004, the Environmental Working Group identified over 287 chemicals found in umbilical cord blood, and many were listed as carcinogenic, neurotoxic, teratogenic and endocrine disrupting. These same toxic chemicals, as well as other potentially dangerous environmental exposures, can also affect and hinder development in adolescents and teens.

Puberty normally begins between the ages of 10 and 16 and can last from two to five years. During puberty, your child’s body goes through a number of metabolic and physiological changes that could intensify the affects of toxic exposures that may not be detected for years. These exposures are also capable of triggering bouts of aggression, depression and defiant behavior making life miserable for everyone.

If you have a child who has a chronic illness or a developmental disorder you probably already know that environmental toxins can further compromise their fragile immune system and exacerbate already challenging behaviors. With their body changing and hormones racing, a child could experience even more difficulty controlling his or her emotions. All the more reason for parents to do all they can to minimize toxic exposures whenever possible. Here are a few categories to be aware of so you can make healthy changes...

**PERSONAL CARE PRODUCTS**

Kids are vulnerable to additional exposures that come along with transitioning into the adolescent and teen years. Many popular personal care products, including cosmetics, deodorants, fragrances, hair and skin care products, are formulated using potentially harmful ingredients, some of which are known carcinogens, neurotoxins and hormone disruptors (see box). On average, teens use about 17 personal care products per day, which exposes them to approximately 174 chemical ingredients every day. This means your child is repeatedly absorbing a toxic chemical cocktail (see chart for ingredients to avoid).

**FEMININE HYGIENE PRODUCTS**

These can contain dioxins, a by-product of the bleaching process used in the production of feminine hygiene products. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, dioxins from feminine pads and tampons can put girls and women at risk for “effects that could suppress the immune system, increase the risk of pelvic inflammatory disease, reduce fertility and interfere with fetal and childhood development.” Mothers should educate their daughters about these dangers and buy organic feminine hygiene products.

**INSECTICIDAL HAIR PRODUCTS**

Each year between six and 12 million kids get head lice, and it’s common for parents to turn to insecticidal shampoos and treatments to eradicate them. However, most pesticide-based, over-the-counter treatments are highly toxic and have been linked to neurological and other health problems. Non-pesticide-based remedies are a safer alternative and include mayonnaise, olive oil, essential oils, and ready-to-use products such as Cetaphil lotion and LiceMD. And don’t forget the old-fashioned approach: plenty of hair conditioner and a nit comb, repeated every week or so until your child’s hair is free of lice.

**CLEANING PRODUCTS**

Most cleaning products contain harsh toxic chemicals that are listed as carcinogenic and can impair neurodevelopment as well as cause irritation, allergies, and asthma. These products also are a constant source of indoor air pollution—on average, indoor air is two to five times more polluted than outdoor air.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Toxin</th>
<th>Found in</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Animal fat extracted from mink or emu oils, beef fat also known as aluminum hydrogenated tallow glutamate</td>
<td>sunscreens, shaving gel, hair spray</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butylated hydroxytoluene (BHT)</td>
<td>lipsticks, eye makeup, moisturizers, foundations, concealers, styling products, nail treatments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coal-tar colors labeled as FD&amp;C or D&amp;C colors—these are carcinogens and human respiratory toxin and are banned in Canada and the European Union (EU)</td>
<td>some dandruff shampoos and psoriasis lotions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diazolidinyl Urea—a possible endocrine disrupting antimicrobial preservative that can release formaldehyde</td>
<td>sunscreens, facial cleansers, moisturizers, acne treatments, foundation, eye makeup, lipsticks, shaving products and body scrubs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diethanolamine (DEA)—an endocrine disruptor that is restricted in Europe as a possible carcinogen</td>
<td>shampoos, body washes, bath oils, facial cleansers, acne treatments, and deodorants to name a few</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formaldehyde—a known human carcinogen and toxic to the immune, cardiovascular, respiratory and reproductive systems. Banned or restricted in cosmetics in Canada, Japan, and the EU</td>
<td>nail products, hair dyes, deodorants, shampoos, soaps, and shaving creams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fragrance—a possible endocrine disruptor, neurotoxin and allergen. May cause obesity, reproductive and developmental harm</td>
<td>shampoos, hair color, acne cleansing wipes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parabens (methyl, ethyl, propyl, butyl, isobutyl)—endocrine disruptors capable of damaging sperm. There are 53 kinds of parabens in more than 20,000 products</td>
<td>moisturizers, shampoos, conditioners, hair styling gels, foundation, skin creams, deodorants, baby lotions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Petroleum and byproducts (mineral oil, petroleum based products)—this can cause allergic reactions and contains impurities that could cause cancer and liver toxicity. Banned in the EU</td>
<td>eye makeup, concealers, lip products, hair relaxers, creams, lotions, styling gels, and wax depilatories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phthalates (dibutyl phthalate, or DBP/diethyl phthalate)—frequently labeled as fragrance, can be toxic to the human respiratory, neurological and reproductive systems. Banned in the EU</td>
<td>nail polish, deodorants, fragrances, lotions, spray and mousses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Placenta (from cow and human placentas and marketed as “all natural”)—contains estrogen and other hormones. Restricted for use in Canada</td>
<td>hair relaxers, deep conditioners, anti-wrinkle creams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Propylene glycol—possible endocrine disruptor and skin irritant</td>
<td>shampoos, conditioners, bar soaps, face cleansers, acne treatments, hair dyes, toothpaste, deodorants, sunscreens, self tanners, nail polishes, lip products, bronzers, foundations, eye makeup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sodium lauryl sulfate (SLS)—possible carcinogen and neurotoxin, may damage the immune system</td>
<td>shampoos, conditioners, bar soaps, body washes, facial cleansers, acne treatments, moisturizers, mascaras, toothpastes, sunscreens, shaving products, hand soaps and colognes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talc—a carcinogen. Thousands of infants die or become seriously ill each year following accidental inhalation of baby powder</td>
<td>face powder, eye shadow, blush, baby powder, deodorant and soap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triclosan—endocrine disruptor, a synthetic antibacterial</td>
<td>deodorants, toothpastes, antibacterial soaps, hand washes, hand sanitizers and other antimicrobial products</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,4 Dioxanes—a rarely listed probable carcinogenic contaminant found in common cosmetic ingredients</td>
<td>shampoo, bubble bath, soaps (including baby soaps) and hair relaxers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**MODERN TECHNOLOGY**

In addition to chemicals found in food, personal care and cleaning products, there are other environmental exposures that most of us just haven’t paid enough attention to, partially because we are often guilty of over-exposing ourselves. I’m talking about cell phones and computers.

Today’s teens are without question the beneficiaries of many of the wireless technological advances of the last decade. They may also be the first generation to grow up with almost unlimited access to cell phones and computers. Studies have suggested frequent cell phone use could increase the risk of brain tumors, migraines, and some behavioral problems in children. Last year, the World Health Organization’s International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) classified cell-phone radiation as “possibly carcinogenic to humans.”

There are 285 million cell phones in use in this country, and two-thirds of children over the age of seven use them. More often than not, cell phones are used for entertainment too—today’s smartphones have become a coveted social connector that enable teens to spend hours talking to friends, listening to music, browsing the Internet, playing games and even watching movies. When they aren’t talking on the phone, they often carry them around in their pockets close to their bodies where radiation can be absorbed into their tissues.

Dr. Joel M. Moskowitz, a researcher at the University of California, Berkeley, and the director of the Center for Family and Community Health at the School of Public Health, has become a prominent voice questioning current cell phone regulations. In 2010 Dr. Moskowitz wrote: “We should address this issue proactively even if we do not fully understand its magnitude. Our government has faced similar public health threats in the past. In 1965, although there was no scientific consensus about the harmful effects of cigarettes, Congress required a precautionary warning label on cigarette packages—more specific warnings
were not required until 1984. Should we have waited 19 years until absolutely certain before we informed the public about these risks?"

Similar to cell phones, computers are another source of electromagnetic radiation. It may be decades before we fully realize what the cumulative effects of low-level radiation will mean for today’s generation of kids that began using cell phones and computers at such an early age, but we do have some early data to suggest that there may be some serious unintended health consequences. Radiation emitted from both cell phones and computers have already been linked to sperm damage.

### 8 Ways to Reduce Your Child’s Exposure

1. **Campaign for Safe Cosmetics** Teens generally use more personal care products than adults. Teens for Safe Cosmetics is a coalition of enthusiastic young women who are educating their peers and policymakers about the dangerous toxins found in most personal care products. They were a driving force in the passage of The California Safe Cosmetic Act and other legislation aimed at eliminating toxic chemicals in many consumer products (see Find Out More).

2. **Clean Green** Replace all of your toxic household cleaners with safe “green” non-toxic products. You essentially need five or six green cleaning products: all purpose, glass cleaner, laundry liquid, dish soap and cream cleanser for tub, tile and porcelain—check out our selection of Greening the Cleaning® products (see Find Out More). Compliment these green products with ingredients already in the cupboard: white distilled vinegar (for laundry softener, cleaning floors to alternate with all purpose cleaner), baking soda and lemon juice (to clean grout and copper pots).

3. **Curb Computer Use** Limit time on the computer, and place it in a ventilated area. Don’t allow computers in your child’s bedroom. Attach a radiation filter plate to your computer screen.

4. **Go Organic** By eating more organic foods you will help prevent unnecessary and dangerous pesticide exposure. Organic products are rich in all of the vitamins, minerals, and micronutrients a teenager needs to feel good, look good and perform well. If you eat animal, dairy and cheese products, stick to organic to reduce your dioxin, hormone and pesticide exposure. Check labels and bypass foods that contain dyes and synthetic food additives—focus instead on whole, fresh foods (canned and ready-prepared microwaveable meals may contain BPA).

5. **Drink Pure Water** Use a home water filtration system, and fill stainless steel or BPA-free bottles for when you’re on the go.

6. **Don’t Smoke** There are over 7,000 chemicals in tobacco smoke, at least 250 of which are known to be harmful.

7. **Manage Pests Safely** Many of the chemicals used by exterminators are known carcinogens, neurotoxins and teratogens. Utilize a pest control or lawn service company that does not use dangerous pesticides (see Find Out More).

8. **Improve the Air** Installing an air filtration system will help improve your home’s indoor air quality.

### 5 Steps for Cell Phone Safety

1. Get your child a phone with the lowest possible SAR (specific absorption rate).

2. Encourage your child to use a headset, speakerphone or text and to avoid putting the phone to their ears as much as they can.

3. Keep phones away from the reproductive organs—it should never be carried in pants pockets.

4. Tell your child to turn off the cell phone when it’s not in use.

5. Tell them to avoid using a cell phone in poor reception areas.

### Eliminate the Threat

So how do we as parents protect our kids who are transitioning into their adolescent and teen years from environmental insults that can threaten their health and future? It’s simple—know what is in the products you purchase. From cosmetics to cell phones, spend a little time investigating the ingredients and safety of the products your kids use. Environmental exposures can be insidious and persistent. Each stage of development—pregnancy, infancy, and puberty—creates new windows of vulnerability in which the effects of exposures can result in serious health problems. Repeated exposures from a variety of products and sources can add up.

Instead of getting stressed out and feeling powerless, parents need to understand the dangers and then minimize their family’s exposures. We must, to the extent we can, take control over the environments in which our children live, learn and play and reduce or eliminate these threats whenever possible.

### Find Out More

- **Campaign for Safe Cosmetics** [www.safecosmetics.org](http://www.safecosmetics.org).
- **Greening the Cleaning® (GTC)** cleaning products are available at [www.dienviro.org](http://www.dienviro.org).
- **EPEAT** The definitive global registry for greener electronics [www.epeat.net](http://www.epeat.net).
- **Federal Communications Commission Information** on the specific absorption rate for cellphones can be found at its website [www.fcc.gov](http://www.fcc.gov).
- **Beyond Pesticides** has contact details for companies that use green pest control methods [www.beyondpesticides.org/safetysource/index.htm](http://www.beyondpesticides.org/safetysource/index.htm).