

Safe Cleaning for Expecting Moms

What you don't know can hurt you and your baby!

By Johannah Nancy

The neighbors who stop by every other day to drop off food are raising their eyebrows at the increasing clutter on your kitchen counters. Your toddler's black-bottomed socks signal that the floors have gone un-mopped for just a little too long. Or maybe "nesting" is starting to kick in, that age-old instinct that compels moms-to-be to prepare the house for baby's arrival. Whatever your reasons for undertaking a major bout of house-cleaning, safety is of utmost importance for pregnant women, and we have a few tips to make the process a little easier, too.

Safety First

Whether you are embarking on a massive cleaning overhaul or are just doing a last-minute dust before the in-laws drop by, cleaning safely should be your chief concern. You might be wondering whether the cleaning products you have under your sink are safe to use during pregnancy.

Nancy Bock, vice president of education at the Soap and Detergent Association (SDA), emphasizes reading product labels to ensure you are using "the proper product for the proper use [in] appropriate amounts." Look for information such as whether rubber gloves are needed, if you should ensure adequate ventilation when you use a product, on what surfaces to use it, how much to use and treatment guidelines in case of accidents. "Labels are jam-packed with information," says Bock. "Know what you are using and how to use it appropriately."

As a rule, most cleaning products on the market today are safe for use during pregnancy, as long as you use them according to label instructions. Bock says, "The products consumers purchase have

gone through regulatory work to make sure they are okay." However, if you feel uncomfortable using a certain product for any reason, assign the task to someone else or find alternatives. Even if the product is safe, merely worrying about it is bad for you and your baby and is not worth the burden on your mind.

What is not safe, however, is mixing cleaning products. You've probably heard it before: never mix chlorine bleach and ammonia. But you might not know how easy it can be to inadvertently mix products containing both. For example, Bock explains that chlorine bleach is a common ingredient in tub, tile and powder dish-

Cleaning Emergency

If an unexpected guest shows up at your filthy house, quickly put the vacuum and a mop in the middle of the floor, throw your hair in a ponytail and don a pair of sweatpants (if they're your partner's most disgusting pair, even better). They'll think they've caught you in the middle of a serious cleaning session. Hand them a broom while you're at it.

washing cleaners. Ammonia or ammonia compounds are commonly found in window cleaners and liquid dishwashing soaps. These seem like perfectly innocuous products (and when used alone they are), but when mixed they can release chlorine gas, which causes eye irritation, headache, shortness of breath and more serious lung problems.

Ventilation is another key to safe cleaning, especially during pregnancy. John Peterson of the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences says, "If you allow [vapors] to get in the air at a certain concentration you can expose yourself and your unborn child." Open windows while cleaning and make sure to leave them open long enough for vapors

to clear the air when you're done. Use exhaust fans in the bathroom. Peterson recommends asking for help when ventilation isn't possible: "If you don't have adequate ventilation, let someone else handle that type of household cleaner."

Where to Begin?

The first thing to do is take a deep breath and relax. You'll get far more done if you are calm and have a plan in mind. Start by making a list of the things you would like to accomplish. Everyone has a different idea of what makes a clean house, from simply corralling clutter to a massive reorganization bonanza complete with scrubbing the ceilings. If you want to do it all, go for it! But if the mere thought overwhelms you, never fear. The beauty of cleaning is that you can do as much or as little as you'd like and still feel the rejuvenating effects.

Make a plan of attack. List the tasks you want to undertake in three categories: big, medium and small projects. For example, clearing the guest room to make way for the nursery is a big project. Look for ways to turn something like this into a series of smaller projects. Wiping out and reorganizing the kitchen cupboards might seem like a lot, but you could do one cup-



The SDA "Dos" and "Don'ts" for Safe Cleaning

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|--|---|
| Do: | Don't: |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Store cleaning products in a secure closet or cabinet■ Store products in their original containers and never remove a label■ Put products away immediately after use■ Clean or rinse measuring cups, utensils and buckets after use | <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Mix cleaning products■ Mix chlorine bleach or products containing it with ammonia or products containing ammonia or ammonia compounds■ Ever hesitate to find out more information about a product |



board a day to make it more manageable.

Once you have your lists made up, tackle one chore at a time. Don't decide to de-clutter, disinfect, reorganize and redecorate your unfinished basement in one afternoon. You won't finish and you'll get discouraged.

Remember that one project might inspire another job for which you hadn't planned. If you want to tidy up the closet in the guest room, you might suddenly find that you have to sort through a sea of shoeboxes filled with pictures. Frances Van Atta of Memphis, TN, says, "It seems like the project tasks just start snowballing."

Stay focused. Sorting pictures, folding out-of-season clothing and testing old batteries are all great activities for low-energy days. Keep a pile of things to sort, then dig in when you need to put your feet up for an hour.

It also helps to stay motivated and remember why you're doing all this work. "It used to be just me and my husband living in our mess," Sonya Humes of Columbus, OH says. "But now there's a baby coming into this less-than-sanitary environment."

You might find that you can no longer overlook those dusty baseboards or the wall of junk that teeters every time you open the hall closet, but resist the urge to super-scrub your wood and tile floors in order to make a cleaner crawling environment for the little one on the way. If you have toddlers already then go for it, but remember that it will be months before your new baby begins crawling. No matter how thorough you are now the results won't last that long!

Getting It Done

The first general rule of cleaning of any

kind is to start from the top. The dust bunnies you loosen from the ceiling with a broom will be lying in wait when you run the vacuum later. If you plan to do some serious cleaning, such as clearing a closet, gutting under the bed or reorganizing the kitchen cabinets, start at the top first. You'll be kicking up some dust, so holding off on the sweeper and dust mop will maximize your cleaning time.

Cleaning during pregnancy brings with it a whole new set of challenges. Many women find it uncomfortable or even impossible to bend over tubs, maneuver behind toilets or reach the crud that settles over doorways. Van Atta has a hard time cleaning out the bathtub. She says, "I became lightheaded a couple of times from doing that, so I've stopped. I now have a very attractive layer of scuzz on the bathtub. I'm not sure what to do about that but squirt it with Scrubbing Bubbles and hope it doesn't get too bad before I give birth and can get to it."

With the heightened smell sensitivities that often accompany pregnancy, some women can't stomach the mere smell of their usual cleaners. If you fall into this category you might be surprised at how well water and a paper towel can get rid of old grime.

And it might not be time yet to put up gates or doorknob locks, but why not get a head start on some of the basics? Some good things to add to your list include throwing away old prescriptions and expired over-the-counter pills, taming stray wiring around stereos, computers and other equipment and rethinking particularly unsteady or dangerous furniture. And you might as well pitch old cleaning products while you're rooting around under the sink for the window cleaner.

Harnessing Your Energy

Some moms-to-be notice considerable swings in their energy level at different times during their pregnancy. Have a sudden burst of energy? Take advantage of it by embarking on a big project on your list. Just make sure to take frequent, short breaks. You might feel like you can move mountains, but taking a moment to rest will give your body a chance to tell you if a longer break would do you good.

On those low-energy days, do a sit-down project like arranging photo albums, polishing your chrome knick-knacks or — better yet — making a list for your partner to tackle... then you can take a nap! "The first trimester was awful because the tiredness just wouldn't go away. Then the second trimester came along and I tried to make up for all that lost time by tackling some crummy jobs that just hadn't been top priority, like dusting baseboards and windowsills, cleaning the vents and reorganizing the closets and dresser drawers," says Van Atta.

When you're so tired you don't think you'll ever clean again, take heart. It will get better. And remember that thing called "nesting?" In the third trimester (although the timing can be a little different for everyone) some women feel a strong instinct to prepare their homes for baby's arrival. Use that urge wisely!

Delegation

In your first trimester, you might not feel like you can do even the most basic cleaning, especially if you're having a particularly draining pregnancy. In times like this, remember one key word: delegation. "In the first 3 months I don't think I cleaned at all. I was just trying to get by,"

says Humes. "I had my husband clean. He's the man."

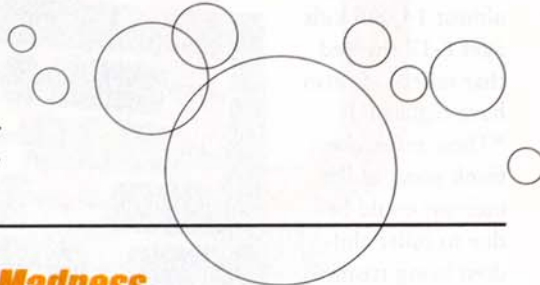
And here's a novel idea: when friends, in-laws and co-workers say, "Let me know if I can do anything," hand them a broom and point to your grimmest room. Granted, this class of delegation is easier said than done, but chances are your well-meaning friends really would be happy to help. And trust us, their houses are not sparkling, either.

Feeling Overwhelmed?

Don't. The goal of cleaning is to make positive changes that make you and your partner feel good about the space you are preparing for baby. Who says every corner of your house must be sparkling? A happy

mom-to-be makes a happy baby, so focus on the effects of the things you do get done. Be proud of yourself for what you accomplish, and while we're in the business of rejuvenation, let's not forget rewarding all this hard work. Perhaps a relaxing facial to deep clean those pores would be appropriate? ☺

About the author: Johannah Haney is a freelance writer in Boston and a contributing editor to ePregnancy.



A Method to Your Cleaning Madness

If the smell of your usual cleaners turns your stomach or you want to try something more natural, try non-toxic, biodegradable Method™ cleaning products. They come in a variety of fruity fragrances that smell good enough to eat and look pretty enough to display. The new stainless steel cleaner and polish cleans without leaving streaks and (here's the best part) leaves a sheer layer behind to protect against future dirt and smudges. The lemon-ginger floor care is another great Method product. It demolishes dirt with a scent long-associated with nausea relief. For more information on Method brand products, go online to ePregnancy.com, scroll down the home page to the Go Codes section and enter 8460.



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