

# Protecting Reproductive Health for Females

Understanding everyday  
toxicants and how you can  
minimize your exposure



## Additional Resources

Learn more about the chemicals  
in your everyday products and  
environment:

**The Environmental Working  
Group:** [www.ewg.org](http://www.ewg.org)

**Explore our website:**  
[www.seed-program.org](http://www.seed-program.org)

**Contact & Follow us:**  
[SEED@hsph.harvard.edu](mailto:SEED@hsph.harvard.edu)  
(Twitter and Instagram)  
[@drmesserlian](https://twitter.com/drmesserlian)



**HARVARD T.H. CHAN**  
SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH

## How can I minimize my exposure?

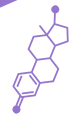


- Replace cosmetics with safer alternatives that are phthalate-, phenol-, and chemical-free
- Avoid chemical UV filters in daily moisturizers and use mineral-based sunscreens
- Do not use perfumes, color dyes, tanning lotion, or other scented personal care products
- Minimize your use of nail polish and remover; avoid acrylic nails
- Shop for fragrance-free lubricants and vaginal wipes; use silicone sexual care items
- Wash produce thoroughly and buy organic when possible (including organic tampons)
- Wash hands before eating and after handling electronics
- Shop for phthalate-, phenol-, and chemical-free products

# EDCs

Endocrine-disrupting chemicals (EDCs) interrupt normal hormonal activity by mimicking, blocking, or altering hormones and changing the way that they function in the body.

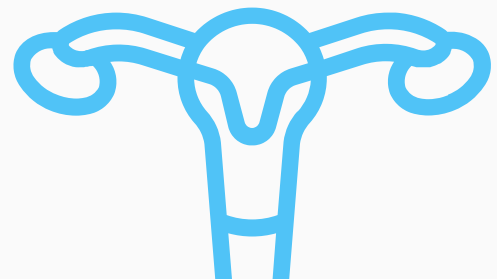
EDCs include phthalates, phenols, per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), and other toxicants. Some EDCs are rapidly removed from the body, while others can remain in the body for a long time. Most people are exposed to multiple EDCs daily, allowing these chemicals to remain at harmful concentrations.



## These chemicals harm your reproductive health

Throughout your life, whether you are trying to get pregnant or not, EDCs can have negative reproductive health effects.

- ✗ Affects menstrual cycles and reduces fertility
- ✗ Decreases immune function and promotes reproductive cancers
- ✗ Increases risk of endometriosis and polycystic ovarian syndrome
- ✗ Increases risk of adverse birth outcomes
- ✗ Increases risk of obesity and metabolic disorders
- ✗ Alters hormone levels



Women tend to be more exposed to EDCs than men because these chemicals hide in cosmetics, hair products, nail polish, and other everyday feminine products. Luckily, several companies have developed clean alternatives that have fewer or no EDCs. Minimizing exposure to EDCs during your reproductive years is especially important.

### What contains EDCs?



Personal care products, dental products, nail polish, nail polish remover, and cosmetics



Hairspray, dyes, gels, and other hair products



Fragrance, including perfume and scented lotions



Tampons and menstrual products; sexual care items



Electronics, vaping mouth pieces, and medical devices



Takeout containers, plastic packaging, canned foods and beverages (single-use plastic)