

The Uconn Buzz



HEALTHIER SPRING CLEANING

With the weather getting warmer, it is time to open the windows, freshen the air, and put away the heavy coats. This time of year is when we start thinking of cleaning around the house, doing some renovation, and even a fresh coat of paint.

When starting your spring cleaning, it is best to begin by looking at the cleaning products you have. Some chemicals can harm your health if too much gets into your body. Becoming aware of potentially harmful substances and clearing them out can help keep you and your family healthy.

“There’s a range of chemicals that you can be exposed to in your home, generally at very low levels,” says Dr. Andrew Rooney, a toxicology and risk expert at the [National Institutes of Health](#). Possible toxic substances can be found in building materials, cookware, cleaning products, shower curtains, furniture, carpet, paint, and other common items. Not all chemicals are harmful. In fact, most substances in our environment are likely safe, explains Dr. Heather Patisaul, a neuroscience and toxicology expert at [North Carolina State University](#). “Only a small subset is probably toxic,” she says. “Although that’s worrisome, there are many simple things you can do to help minimize your exposure.” Often, it’s how much you’re exposed to that can make a chemical harmful. The amount that’s “safe” varies for each substance. Sometimes it’s obvious when a chemical is hazardous. You may get a rash from spilling a household cleaner on your skin. Or you may start coughing when you breathe in irritating fumes. To avoid known health risks, be sure to read the instructions carefully on your household products, and follow any safety precautions.

Dangerous Chemicals

“Chemicals can come out of our products and end up in the air and dust in the home, where they can enter your body,”

says [Dr. Ami Zota](#), an environmental and public health expert at George Washington University. Her team recently discovered 45 different chemicals that are commonly found in indoor dust. Many of the identified chemicals belong to a group called “[endocrine disruptors](#).”

When endocrine disruptors get into your body, they can mimic or block the natural hormones your body makes. Evidence suggests that endocrine disruptors might [reduce fertility, raise the risk for some cancers, or cause other harms](#). These chemicals may pose their greatest health risks to children exposed in the womb or during their first few years of life - when hormones are guiding development of the body’s organs and brain. Several types of chemical classes tied to hormone disruption, including [phthalates](#) (pronounced THAL-ates), [PFCs](#) (or perfluorinated chemicals), and [flame retardants](#), and can be found in certain fragrances, pesticides, and stain-resistant coatings.

Phthalates are a family of man-made chemicals used to make plastics, cleaners, and fragrances. The human health effects of phthalates are not yet fully known but are being studied by several government agencies. “Many hundreds of chemicals can be classified as fragrance,” Patisaul explains. “So when you use a cleaner with a scent, it probably has some phthalates in it—even though the label doesn’t specifically say phthalates.” You can look for “fragrance-free” products. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) also provides the “Safer Choice” label, which is used on products made with ingredients that are safer for human health and the environment.

PFCs are widely used to make everyday products more resistant to stains, grease, and water. They can be found in nonstick cookware, stain-resistant sofas and carpets, and waterproofed clothing. Some evidence suggests that certain PFCs may also affect human health, with possible ties to low birth weight, obesity, and testicular

and kidney cancers.

Certain PFCs, like those used to make Teflon, are being phased out of use in the U.S. But some older household items, like nonstick pans, may still contain them. If you have an older nonstick pan that is dinged and worn out, try to replace it.

“The best thing is to become aware that there are chemicals in your environment, and there are very simple things that you can do to lower your exposure,” Patisaul says. Chemicals are everywhere, and most are harmless. Limiting the potentially toxic ones in your day-to-day life can help you create a safer, healthier home.

Take Home Tips

Here are some tips and links to help you make informed decisions, purchase safer products, make your own cleaning products and maintain a healthy house.

[Green Seal](#) is an independent non-profit that created standards to assess the environmental responsibility of products.

[Safer Choice](#) from the EPA helps consumers, businesses, and purchasers find products that perform and are safer for human health and the environment.

[NIH Household Product Database](#) contains health and safety information on products such as cleaners, pet care, arts and crafts, and much more.

If you are interested in making your own cleaners [Toxic-Free Futures](#), an organization that advocates for the use of safer products, chemicals and practices has several recipes on their website for cleaners such as window cleaner, oven cleaner, toilet bowl cleaner and an all purpose cleaner.

Source: NIH News in Health

HAPPENINGS AROUND TOWN

[Planning for Care & Protecting you Assets as You Age Workshop](#), Wed. April 4, at 6pm. The Eastern Highlands Health District Be Well Program presents a workshop designed for people in their 50's and 60's who want to learn more about long term care insurance, estate planning, caregiver support, and more. RSVP required.

[Finally Spring 5K and Kids Run](#), Sat. April 7, at 9:30am. This is the 10th anniversary of this event. Highland Park School, 389 Porter Street, Manchester. Registration ends on April 6th.

[Strong Family Farm 5th Annual Chicken Run, 5K Walk & Kids Run](#), Sunday, April 8, at 9am. Strong Family Farm 274 West St, Vernon.

[Shenipsit Lake Recreation Program Opens for 25th Season](#), Sat. April 14. Connecticut Water & the Shenipsit Lake Association announce that the Shenipsit Lake Recreation Program will open for free fishing and hiking at Connecticut Water's Shenipsit Lake Reservoir.

[UConn Green Infrastructure Campus Tour](#), Thursday, April 19 1-2:30pm Come on a short walking tour showcasing some new approaches to managing storm water and protecting water quality. Topics include low impact development, green infrastructure practices such as green roofs, rain gardens and pervious pavements. Meet in room 304A of the Student Union for a 15-minute orientation before starting the tour. Registration is greatly appreciated. Rain or shine. Email clear@uconn.edu.

[Bicentennial Pond Universal Access Trail Official Opening & Guided Hike](#), Sat. April 21, from 2-4pm. A brief ribbon cutting ceremony will be followed by a guided hike led by naturalists Sue and Tom Harrington. Funded by a CT DEEP Recreational Trails Program Grant, this new 0.7 trail allows people of all abilities to access the natural areas and fitness opportunities in Schoolhouse Brook Park.

Be Well Rewards

Registration for the 2018 Rewards Program is open. Please use [this link](http://www.surveymonkey.com/r/ewellrewards2018) (www.surveymonkey.com/r/ewellrewards2018)

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Spinach Meatloaf

INGREDIENTS

- ◆ 1 1/2 lb. lean ground beef
- ◆ 10 oz. frozen chopped spinach, thawed
- ◆ 1 1/2 cups seasoned bread crumbs
- ◆ 1 cup Mozzarella cheese, shredded & divided
- ◆ 2 eggs

DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 350°; spray a 5x9 loaf pan with cooking spray
2. Press water out of thawed spinach
3. In a large bowl, combine beef, spinach, bread crumbs, 1/2 cup cheese (reserve 1/2 cup of cheese for top of loaf) and eggs and mix well; transfer to loaf pan
4. Bake 1 hour (or until cooked thoroughly). Top with remaining cheese and return to oven to melt.

Note: lean ground turkey or lean ground chicken can be used in place of the beef



April is Distracted Driving Awareness Month



Distracted driving is a public health issue that affects us all. The latest statistics show motor vehicle fatalities are up 6% from 2015. About 4.57 million people were injured seriously enough to require medical attention in motor vehicle crashes in 2017 & costs to society totaled \$413.8 billion. [More than 40,000 people](#) were killed on our roadways last year & distracted driving is a major contributor. Each death is 100% preventable. Threats come from cell phones, dashboard infotainment systems, and even evolving voice command features. Just one second of your attention is all it takes to change a life forever. Distracted Driving Awareness Month in April is a united effort to

recognize and eliminate preventable deaths from distracted driving.

Here is the National Safety Councils ["Lifesaving Checklist."](#)

- First and foremost, turn off your cell phone. Put it in the glove compartment, in your purse or in your trunk. There is no safe way to make a call while driving, not even hands-free.
- Send and read text messages and emails before you start driving.
- If you're going on a longer drive, schedule breaks to stop, park safely, and respond to messages.
- Using voice features in your car's infotainment system is also distracting. Take care of communications before you start driving.
- Know where you're going before

you put the car in "drive." Put your destination into your GPS so you do not need to touch it while the car is moving.

- Social media can wait. No update, tweet or video is worth a life.

Source: National Safety Council

Be Well is an employee wellness program provided through the Eastern Highlands Health District with funding from The CT Department of Health. The goal of the program is to make the healthy choice the easy choice.

