

# Super Natural Home Quiz

## *Take an Inventory of Your Daily Exposure to Dangerous Chemicals*

Whether we live in an old or a new home or apartment, it can be shocking to realize how we expose ourselves to toxic chemicals on a daily basis. Sometimes we take clean to an extreme and unwittingly buy disinfectants and cleansers that can compromise our health and well-being. Or we're not aware of the hidden additives in our food, or the effects of the invisible gasses that are released from plastics or flame retardants in our furniture.

In this quiz we're going to take a look at every room in your home, from the foods (and containers) inside your fridge and pantry, to the bottles lining your sinks and shower stalls, to the furniture and accessories with which you come into daily contact. As you move from room to room, let your eyes, your nose, and even your intuition be your guide.

### **START THE QUIZ**

Grab a pen or pencil and a notebook. Ask your children and spouse to join you. It can be fun and educational for them as well. I promise this will be worth your time. Start by writing down the date you take this quiz. The results will help you identify and focus on areas needing improvement. You can take the quiz again in 6 months, after you've made positive changes, to see how well you're doing.

I'm going to ask you to take a close look at what you're buying and why. This is an exercise that will provide insight into your choices so you can get a sense of just how often you are exposed to chemicals in your home. Don't worry! Once you see the choices you've made, you can start making new choices that will enhance your well-being, keep you and your family healthy, and even improve the health of the planet. And I'm going to show you how to do just that step by step. It's easier than you think, and the rewards are infinite. Let's get started.

*The Kitchen, Pantry, and Refrigerator:*

1. Does the food you eat contain pesticides?

Yes  No  Don't know

**Hint:** If the food in question is not labeled organic or not grown on a local farm, it almost certainly will contain pesticides.

**Problem:** Pesticides are designed to kill, and are toxic to us and the environment. They are known to harm the human neurologic system and to deplete the Earth's protective ozone layer, leading to more skin cancer.

2. Does the food you eat contain growth hormones?

Yes  No  Don't know

**Hint:** If the meat or poultry isn't organic or "grass-fed" (raised on pasture), or your milk products aren't labeled organic, they probably contain growth hormones. (Later on, I'll share what this could mean from a biological standpoint.)

**Problem:** As many as two-thirds of cattle raised in the United States are injected with rBGH (recombinant bovine growth hormone) to make them produce more milk. The milk is shipped throughout the country, added to products such as cream, cheese, yogurt and baked goods, but never labeled as such.

3. Do your beverages contain artificial sweeteners?

Yes  No  Don't know

**Hint:** All "diet" soda contains artificial sweeteners. The same goes for foods and other beverages labeled with the words "diet," "lite," "sugarless," or "no sugar." Lots of low-calorie snacks are marketed as such because they swap out the real thing for artificial sugars. Look for names such as NutraSweet, Sweet'n Low, Equal, sucralose, and aspartame.

**Problem:** Artificial sweeteners are known hazards. Aspartame, considered a ticking time bomb by scientists, may actually stimulate appetite and bring on a craving for carbohydrates. In addition, aspartame contains methanol, which the body breaks down into formaldehyde. (Formaldehyde is one of the main substances pumped into a dead body during the embalming process!)

4. Does your food or beverages contain high-fructose corn syrup?

Yes  No  Don't know

**Hint:** Most brands of soda, even natural ones, are sweetened mainly with high-fructose corn syrup (HFCS), the product of a complex industrial process in which starch is extracted from corn and converted into glucose and fructose. HFCS is also ubiquitous in condiments, snacks, and "sugary" beverages, even if those drinks are not classified as "soda." You'll find it listed under ingredients.

**Problem:** Researchers agree that HFCS is a major contributor to Americans' calorie intake and a significant cause of overweight and obesity—a prime risk factor for type 2 diabetes, which is on the rise.

5. Do you use Teflon-coated or other nonstick cookware?  
 Yes  No  Don't know

**Hint:** Almost all brands of nonstick cookware have a toxic coating.

**Problem:** Most nonstick cookware gives off odorless, toxic fumes when used with high heat. The fumes are known to kill pet birds!

6. Do you or your children drink from plastic bottles that leach BPA?  
 Yes  No  Don't know

**Hint:** Not all plastics are equal. Check the bottom of your bottles for the recycling number.

**Problem:** Hard polycarbonate (#7 recycling number) bottles may leach an artificial estrogen known as bisphenol A. This chemical is linked to increased risk of miscarriage and birth defects, as well as prostate cancer. Scratches in the plastic, harsh detergents, and boiling liquids exacerbate the leaching.

7. Do you store your food in plastic?  
 Yes  No  Don't know

**Hint:** Tupperware and other storage containers are commonly made with polycarbonate plastic or polyvinyl chloride.

**Problem:** Plastic containers leach toxic chemicals into the food they store. The dangers increase when food is heated in these plastic containers, since the heat breaks down the plastic and destabilizes it, thus increasing the release of toxic chemicals into your food.

#### *The Bathroom:*

8. Do you use artificially scented household products, including those for skin and hair?  
 Yes  No  Don't know

**Hint:** You may suffer from chronic headaches or hives, and be completely unaware of the connection to your perfume or favorite detergent's aroma.

**Problem:** Almost all of the ingredients used to create fragrances today are made with synthetic compounds that are known toxins and sensitizers.

9. Look at the labels on your makeup and body care products (get a magnifying glass if necessary!). Do you see words like parabens (including the forms methyl, propyl, or butyl)?  
 Yes  No  Don't know

**Hint:** Parabens are used as preservatives in most cosmetics and personal care products.

**Problem:** Parabens are dangerous; they have been found in most breast tumors and can be damaging to the immune system.

10. Does your bathroom contain vinyl wallpaper?  
 Yes  No  Don't know

**Hint:** If it's washable, it is probably made of vinyl.

**Problem:** PVC (vinyl) is considered to be so toxic that it is banned in some parts of Europe. If you use vinyl wallpaper in high-moisture areas in your home, like the bathroom, it can create a vapor barrier that traps moisture in the wall and encourages mold growth.

11. Do you use air fresheners?  
 Yes  No  Don't know

**Hint:** Even air fresheners marketed as "all-natural" or "unscented" can contain hazardous chemicals.

**Problem:** Most air fresheners contain phthalates, chemicals that can cause hormonal abnormalities, birth defects and reproductive problems. In addition to phthalates, air fresheners may contain allergens, volatile organic compounds (VOCs), and cancer-causing chemicals such as benzene and formaldehyde.

*The Bedroom, Nursery, or Kid's Room:*

12. Is your mattress made of synthetic materials?  
 Yes  No  Don't know

**Hint:** If you, your spouse, or your child has trouble falling asleep or wakes up often during the night, it could be the fault of your mattress.

**Problem:** The typical mattress contains chemicals such as polyurethane, Styrofoam, polyester, fire retardants, adhesives, and bonding agents that are recognized carcinogens. These trap the moisture our bodies release during sleep, and this attracts dust mites, which are allergens.

13. Have you purchased cotton-blend or polyester sheets from a regular retail store?  
 Yes  No  Don't know

**Hint:** Most sheets sold in retail stores are treated with a toxic finish made from formaldehyde that prevents wrinkles and stains. They are labeled as "wrinkle-resistant," "easy care," or "permanent press."

**Problem:** Formaldehyde, according to the International Agency for Research on Cancer, is a toxic, cancer-causing substance.

14. Do you, your spouse, or your child wear synthetic fabrics and/or sleep in synthetic pajamas?  
 Yes  No  Don't know

**Hint:** Most synthetic fabrics are treated with chemicals during and after processing, and most children's pajamas are made with fabric that is treated with flame-retardant chemicals, and emit formaldehyde gas.

**Problem:** Perfluorinated chemicals (PFCs), which include Teflon, are being added to clothing because it makes them last longer and also can make them wrinkle-free. Most clothing labeled "no-iron" contains PFCs. The EPA asserts that PFCs cause cancer.

*The Living Room, Den, and Home Office:*

15. Did you recently install new synthetic carpeting?

Yes  No  Don't know

**Hint:** If you, your spouse or your children have asthma, skin rashes, or food allergies, the condition could be the result of breathing the off-gases from your new carpeting.

**Problem:** Carpeting is usually made of synthetic fibers that have been treated with pesticides and fungicide. These chemicals are emitted as "off-gas" from new carpeting.

16. Was the room painted or wallpapered within the last year?

Yes  No  Don't know

**Hint:** If you smell a strong odor coming from your walls, it's caused by airborne chemicals known as volatile organic compounds, or VOCs. These include ethers (PBDEs) and phthalates, as well as glues or adhesives used in the wallpaper.

**Problem:** Most VOCs are known to cause serious health problems.

17. Is your furniture made of particle board?

Yes  No  Don't know

**Hint:** Particle board is used in shelving and cabinets.

**Problem:** In most homes, particle board is a major source of formaldehyde in the environment.

18. Was the furniture's upholstery treated with a flame retardant?

Yes  No  Don't know

**Hint:** Chances are if you bought your furniture from a department store or conventional furniture store, flame retardants were used to treat the fabric.

**Problem:** Flame retardants are shown to accumulate in breast milk and negatively affect children's brain function.

*Household Cleaners:*

19. Do any of your household cleaners contain ingredients such as ammonia, chlorine bleach, phosphates, or formaldehyde?

Yes  No  Don't know

**Hint:** If you see a skull and cross bones on the bottle, you can be sure these ingredients are present! If there's a warning on the label that the product is poisonous, dangerous, or flammable, then it's toxic for you to use.

**Problem:** Most all-purpose cleaners, ammonia-based cleaners, bleach, metal polish, disinfectants, drain cleaners, glass cleaners, dishwashing detergents, oven cleaners, carpet cleaners, mothballs, mold and mildew cleaners, and scouring powders contain irritants and dangerous chemicals.

*Away from Home:*

20. Do you know what type of oil is used when eating at restaurants, cafeterias, hotels, or on planes?

Yes  No  Don't know

**Hint:** Most restaurants serve food cooked with partially hydrogenated vegetable oil that contain trans fats.

**Problem:** Partially hydrogenated vegetable oil is a toxic substance, harmful in even tiny quantities.

*Scoring This Quiz*

- If you checked “yes” for 15 or more questions, you are at “high risk” for exposure to toxic chemicals and should take immediate action to make healthier choices.
- If you checked “yes” for eight to 14 questions, you are at “moderate risk” but still should take an active approach to making a change toward a greener existence.
- If you checked “yes” to zero to seven questions, you’re doing great! You might want to consider making one change per month to get you to have a super natural home for you and your family!

Take a look at your self-inventory score and think about the choices you make each day, keeping in mind that all of the problems in the quiz have simple, practical solutions to them. Consider the possible cumulative effects on your health and the health of your loved ones. Each choice has a profound impact on your well-being. For self-reflection and to further your understanding, ask yourself:

- Are your choices informed?
- Are they influenced by popular trends, budget, or convenience?
- Why did you choose each product? (Hint: Because you saw them in an ad on TV? Because you grew up using these products?)
- Do you prefer certain brand name products? Why?
- Does beautiful packaging make you overlook ingredients on the label?

We unwittingly choose products when we are unaware of the health implications or have incomplete information, or when we are led by fads or convenience. But ultimately we pay a big price. Luckily, you can reward yourself the gift of health and vitality by the decisions you make daily. With the guidance I will provide on the pages of *Super Natural Home*, you can make a choice to live a more conscious life that benefits you, your family, and the planet.