

Green and Clean

by Jane Georgiou, Nic's mum

(from the "How to..." column in the *Treating Autism* newsletter).

Words such as 'organic' and 'natural products' used to conjure up images of bearded, sock-n-sandal wearers (and that was just the women!) But the times are changing. Many parents of children with ASD have already made the commitment to take care of their own and their children's health by avoiding exposure to chemicals, food additives, growth hormones, etc. To have a truly healthy environment I believe you need to clean up both the inside and the out—and that means a total chemical ban. This is about lifestyle choices and finding alternatives that serve our overall well-being.

My personal journey into hippydom began when my son ate a dishwasher tablet. After spending an hour in the doctor's surgery I cleared the kitchen and bathroom cupboards and filled a whole black sack with bottles and aerosols. I took myself off to supermarket to replace the items and decided on a little experiment while I was there. I filled up two baskets, one with my old chemical style products and the other with simple and affordable products. The price comparison was amazing! My old basket would have cost £30, compared to £6 for naturals. By using natural products you can keep your home clean on a budget and also avoid exposure to the harsh chemicals found in some cleaners.

Products we now use:

- Micro fibre cloths: Wonderful things! They take away the need for elbow grease and can go in the washing machine
- Liquid soap: Any supermarket unscented 'green' liquid will do
- White distilled vinegar: A great natural cleaning product as well as a disinfectant and deodoriser. Don't worry about your home smelling like pee because the smell disappears when it dries.
- Essential oils: Four drops for every pint of water is a good ratio. I tend to mix and match the following depending on my mood. Lavender can be relaxing. Chamomile to reduce stress. Tea Tree Oil to invigorate. Citrus oils are good in the kitchen and have anti-bacterial properties so you can use this type of natural mixture for cleaning countertops
- Baking powder: Cleans, deodorizes, softens water, and scours. It neutralizes odours and makes a good sink, bath, oven, and worktop scourer.
- Lemon juice: Removes stains, cuts grease, and polishes metal. Effective against most household bacteria.
- Borax: A naturally occurring mineral composed of sodium, boron, oxygen and water. Borax does not contain phosphates or chlorine, but you must keep it well away from children as it's caustic.

A few simple tips for having a clean and green living environment. There's no hard and fast rule for measurements, I just play around. For everyday surface cleaning I use a mix of 1 part white vinegar to 4 parts water and a dash of baking power. You can mix them together with warm water in a small spray bottle and use directly on to surfaces, but I think it's more fun to sprinkle the powder directly onto the surface (use a flour shaker from the kitchen shop) and then spray the vinegar/water solution. It's very satisfying in a childish way watching the mixture foam and bubble up! The inside of my oven has never been so clean!

This document is the intellectual property of the author and may be shared only if left unaltered and in its entirety with credit given.

I don't use detergent or softeners in my washing machine, only water and vinegar (occasionally borax on really dirty clothes). Vinegar can be used as a natural fabric softener; it's also great for sensitive skin. Add 1/4 cup of vinegar to the rinse cycle in place of store bought fabric softener—this also removes soap residue from clothes. You could use an essential oil at this stage in the wash cycle if you like. You can use essential oils such as lavender and chamomile mixed with water in a spray bottle and either spray on to dry clothes or spritz when they come out of the machine before putting them on the line.

I used to buy perfumed plug-in air fresheners (*editors note: a recent study found that air fresheners contain up to 20 volatile organic compounds, seven of which are considered toxic or hazardous under federal law in the United States*). Now I open all the windows for at least 10 minutes a day and have the kitchen windows open when cooking. House plants are a good clean alternative to air purifiers; they really do help to clean up the atmosphere. Another nice tip is to use a few sprinkles of essential oils in a bowl of water on the window sills (especially good in summer when the circulating air really does help to cool down rooms). It goes without saying really, but ban smoking in the home.

When cleaning your carpets try sprinkling baking powder half an hour before vacuuming. We also sometimes use essential oils and water in a spray as fabric and carpet fresheners.

To de-grease sink and bath drains, pour 1/2 cup of baking soda powder down the drain followed by 1 cup vinegar; let it bubble for 15 minutes then wash away with hot water.

For our child's personal body care we don't use shampoo, soap, or perfumes. At bath time we use only water, cider vinegar, essential oils and Epsom salts. We use coconut oil, olive oil and sweet almond oil (again with essential oils) for skin care and relaxing massages. The body secretes an anti bacterial agent called dermicidin which is selectively toxic to bad bacteria but which doesn't affect the good bacteria so you don't really want to wash this off your skin (whatever you do, don't show your teenagers this article).

If your child wears nappies, try and use organic and bleach free nappies if you can afford it. Also try and avoid baby wipes.

As for the toilet, salt, a scrubbing brush and marigolds work best. For a weekly clean pour 1 cup of borax into the toilet before going to bed and, in the morning, scrub and flush. My sister swears that placing an upright and opened can of a well known fizzy drink into the bowl will take off all stains and limescale, but with my little one in the house I think that would be asking for trouble.

Many of our kids having pica. Many of our kids have overloaded detoxification systems. Research shows that about 80% of our immune system is located in our digestive system. So, when it comes to cleaning products, a great rule to try to follow is if you can't put it in your mouth, don't let it in your house.

Editor's note: If you want more information there are many books available. A highly recommended one, full of inexpensive and safe cleaning product recipes and tips is called *Clean House, Clean Planet* by Karen Logan.

This document is the intellectual property of the author and may be shared only if left unaltered and in its entirety with credit given.