



Toxins—Too Close for Comfort

Elson Haas, MD

As a doctor who practices integrative medicine, I focus on health care and not just disease care. I always attempt to understand the deeper underlying causes of any illness or condition and not simply treat superficial symptoms. So when it comes to looking at causes of disease I am working from the inside out rather than outside in.

This is such an important topic that I devoted an entire chapter to the “Causes of Disease” in my latest book *Staying Healthy with NEW Medicine*. In brief, I believe that cellular dysfunction is one of the main causes of body imbalance, inflammation, and disease. The health of our cells is affected adversely by two primary factors—deficiency, by which I mean not enough intake and assimilation of the necessary (required) nutrients; and toxicity—contact with too many harmful man-made chemicals and chemical-containing products.

Nutrients

As for nutrients—we need an adequate supply of amino acids (from protein foods), fatty acids, some carbohydrates, plus vitamins, minerals, and phytonutrients (these are chemicals that plants produce and use to stay healthy—providing protection, for example, from insect attacks or radiation from UV rays). Any deficiency of these essential nutrients can diminish cellular function.

Toxins

As for toxins—the external environment has a significant impact on our cell health—from the level of contaminants, chemicals and artificial additives in the foods we eat, the water we drink, and the air we breathe, and with a special concern for the products we use in our homes and gardens, or put on our bodies.

In fact personal care products are one of the most common yet overlooked sources of environmental toxicity.

The average adult uses nine personal care products a day, exposing themselves to as many as 126 different chemical ingredients. What makes things worse is that items like toothpaste, shampoo, lotion, makeup, or deodorant, are not held to the same standard as food or drugs, which we put in our



Essential Nutrients For Avoiding Cellular Deficiency

Macronutrients:

Proteins and amino acids, carbohydrates, fats and essential oils

Micronutrients:

Vitamins: A, C, D, E, K, B₁, B₆, B₃, B₁₂, CoQ₁₀, Lipoic acid (*Most must come from our diet, and a few the body makes, like coQ10 and lipoic acid.*)

Minerals: all must come from our diet and include calcium, magnesium, potassium, sodium, zinc, copper, iron, manganese, selenium, iodine, traces of boron and others. *In addition the soil must contain these minerals for them to be in our food, and much soil is now seriously depleted.*

Phytonutrients: hundreds of plant substances, such as flavonoids and carotenoids, which give our fruits, vegetables, herbs and basically all foods their color, aroma, and add to their flavor. These have many physiological and protective functions for our body.

Antioxidants: these nutrients protect us from “free radicals,” the unstable molecules that can cause inflammation and damage; these nutrients include Vitamins A (and beta-carotene), C, D, and E plus some B vitamins; minerals zinc and selenium, with protective activity also from iron and magnesium; coenzyme Q₁₀ and alpha lipoic acid; and amino acid L-cysteine, which helps support glutathione.



bodies. Hair coloring is potentially one of the most toxic of all, linked to increased rates of breast cancer in a recent 2017 Rutgers University study. This is especially troubling given that an estimated 75 percent of U.S. women over age 18 color their hair. Obviously we need more research on the short and long-term health consequences of using these kinds of products. As consumers we need to be aware of the toxic potential of what we buy.

In addition many cosmetics are now imported, with virtually no regulation or inspection. The FDA recently stated that while such shipments had doubled in the past decade, there were just six inspectors assigned to the more than 3,000,000 shipments which arrived last year from over 180 different countries and 29,000 foreign companies, few of which have registered with the agency, as they are not required to do so.

- The FDA physically inspected just 0.3 percent of such imports last year.
- Laboratory tests were conducted on an even smaller sample— just 364.
- 20 percent of those tests led to adverse findings; including bacterial contamination, illegal color additives, ingredients that were not on the label as required, and unsafe chemical substances like mercury that can cause kidney and nervous system damage.

Given that it is doing so few inspections, the FDA really has no way of knowing the scope of the problem with imported cosmetics, and neither do we. Clearly this is area where we all need to pay close attention to what we buy and what we use.

Pollutants in the Home and Office

Another area of similar concern is the widespread use of potentially toxic chemical products in our homes and gardens. Just to give you some idea of the scope of this problem, here's a list of the major indoor pollutant sources to watch out for. It is from my book *Staying Healthy with Nutrition*:

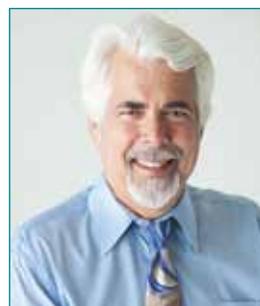
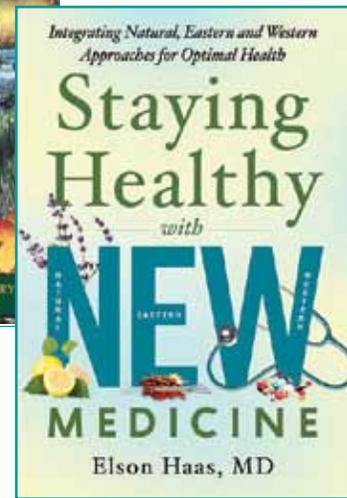
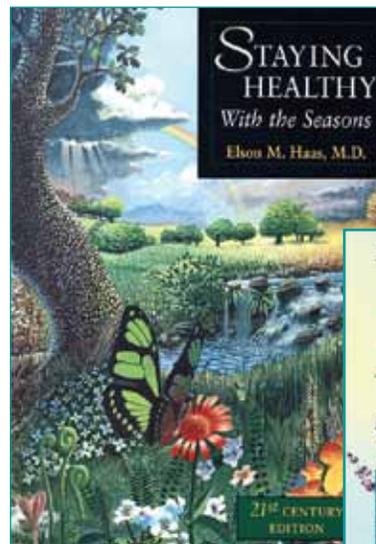
- Hydrocarbon fuel combustion—the burning of coal, gasoline, natural gas, wax candles
- Pesticide sprays—used on insects and rodents
- Cleaning fluids—cleansers, soap, bleach, detergents, ammonia, window cleaners
- Paints, adhesives glues, and solvents—used in housework and hobbies
- Plastics—used in many areas, but especially important to review drinking water, beverage and food storage containers
- Heating/Cooling systems—which can spread toxins, especially forced-air systems. This also includes your car.

- Smoke—(secondary or side-stream, smoke is now clearly a big problem), fireplace smoke or barbecue chemicals can also be hazardous
- Aerosol sprays—disinfectants, and cleaners—mostly propellants, which may be fluorocarbons or hydrocarbons, both of which are problematic
- Dust—which can carry sensitizing or toxic materials, including mites, molds, bacteria, pollens, carbon monoxide, asbestos, pesticides, solvents, sulfur dioxide, lead, smoke, and vinyl chloride

Obviously we need to know more about the short and long-term health implications of using these kinds of products both in our homes and on our bodies, and we need to be watchful consumers, especially when children are involved where any negative effects can be even more serious and long lasting. A great resource that I recommend is the Environmental Working Group's (EWG) www.ewg.org online database of potentially toxic household and cosmetic products, which also includes recommended non-toxic alternatives.

This is all part of living more naturally, using fewer chemicals on and in our bodies and in our surroundings overall; this is a conscientious reduction in the use of synthetically made and petro-chemically-based products, which have a negative and toxic downstream effect in both our local and global environments.

This shift to a more natural lifestyle is growing across our nation and the globe, and is based largely on the same principles as those of NEW Medicine: taking personal responsibility for our health and for the planet, and recognizing the incredibly complex interactions between the decisions we make, the products we use, and their affect upon our entire environment and ecosystem, including our own and our family's health. ■



Elson Haas, MD is a practicing integrative family physician since 1973 and is founder/director of the Preventive Medical Center of Marin (pmmcmarin.com) in San Rafael, CA. Dr. Haas is the author

of 11 books on health, nutrition, and detoxification, including *Staying Healthy with Nutrition*, *The Detox Diet*, *The False Fat Diet*, and the classic, *Staying Healthy with the Seasons*. His most recent books are *Ultimate Immunity* (Rodale 2015) and the just self published *Staying Healthy with NEW Medicine: Integrating Natural, Eastern, and Western Approaches for Optimal Health*. Learn more at ElsonHaasMD.com. Dr. Haas, as Dr. Sun, creates entertaining educational products for children and families, including The Anatomix Comix™ with CD of songs and also available as Apps at www.seasonsstudios.com.