

## A Town & Country Guide

# How to Clean Up Your Life

It's easier—and more essential—than you think.

By Deirdre Imus with Diane Guernsey

MY INTEREST in healthy, holistic living dates back to when I was a child. I was a really fast runner—I beat the fastest boy in grade school. In high school I wanted to be the fastest, strongest runner I could be. I started searching out health-food stores and figuring out which foods made me feel better and run faster. I also started to educate myself by reading, and over time I learned about the effects of toxic chemicals and foods on our environment and our health, especially our children's health.

This really became clear to me in 1992, when I started helping my husband, Don Imus, with his annual “radiothon” for kids with cancer. I started asking questions and learning how big a role toxic exposures can play in children's cancers. According to a study conducted in 2003 at the University of Massachusetts at Lowell, while as many as 20 percent of childhood cancers are solely genetic, a large percentage may well be linked to lifestyle factors, including, for genetically predisposed children, exposure to environmental toxins. Because they are smaller and still developing, children react to toxins more severely than adults—and those reactions are reflected in their cancer rates. Cancer is the most common disease to kill children between the ages of one and fourteen. Childhood cancers in the U.S. increased by approximately 21 percent between 1975 and 1998, and the National Cancer Institute estimates that incidences of childhood cancer, especially leukemia and brain tumors, will continue to increase at a rate of 1 percent annually.

In 1998 my husband, his brother, Fred, and I created the Imus Ranch, a working cattle ranch for kids with cancer, near Santa Fe ([imusranch.com](http://imusranch.com)). This is a safe, holistic environment that supports the kids' health by eliminating indoor and outdoor toxins. In 2001 I expanded my mission by launching the Deirdre Imus Environmental Center for Pediatric Oncology at Hackensack University Medical Center, in New Jersey, one of the country's first hospital-based programs dedicated to identifying, controlling and ultimately eliminating hazardous environmental factors that may cause or contribute to childhood and adult cancers (for more information, call 201-336-8071 or visit [dienviro.com](http://dienviro.com)).

A lot of my work at the center involves educating parents about unhealthy foods and toxic chemicals and helping them find healthy alternatives. Why should you go to the trouble of making these changes? First, you'll protect your child's health

and the health of other children. Second, you'll feel better from day to day, physically, mentally and emotionally. Living more healthfully is not a magic bullet, but it does improve your quality of life. Healthy changes don't need to be drastic. It's not a matter of throwing out everything in your pantry overnight, but of gradually making small changes. My philosophy is that we are all searching for ways to be healthier and closer to nature, whether we're conscious of it or not. I hope this article provides some good answers in your search.

## Food, Drink & Diet

**MEAT:** I believe that if people choose to eat meat and dairy products, those foods should be organic, and people should learn about the quality of the food and how it's farmed. By the quality of the food, I mean the health of the animal. A cow or sheep should be raised organically (without pesticide-laced or genetically modified feed and free of hormones and antibiotics). It shouldn't be cooped up and forced to sit in its own feces day after day, waiting to be slaughtered. If an animal is raised nonorganically, a person who eats it ingests the pesticides, antibiotics, hormones, fungicides, preservatives and other contaminants it has absorbed.

With fish, there's the issue of contamination with neurotoxins like mercury, lead and PCBs. It's very hard to find uncontaminated fish. Wild-caught Alaskan salmon is said to be safe, but I don't know that any fish is completely free of these contaminants. The EPA and FDA recommend that pregnant women and women planning to get pregnant avoid tuna, swordfish and other fish known to contain very high amounts of mercury. My question is, Why advise this only for pregnant women when these toxins are bioaccumulative in everyone (meaning that once they get into your body, it takes a long time to get rid of them)? It's common sense to advise people of all ages to stop eating contaminated fish, period.

Another issue is whether the animal (or the vegetable or the fruit, for that matter) has been farmed according to standard agribusiness practices: sprayed with pesticides, modified genetically and/or injected with hormones and antibiotics. Some studies indicate a higher incidence of leukemias, brain tumors

and other cancers in children and adults exposed to these pesticides and toxins.

You can find organic, hormone-free chicken, beef and other meats at Whole Foods Market, Wild Oats Natural Marketplace and Trader Joe's stores and at small local organic markets and specialty stores. Healthy fish is much harder to find, and it definitely costs a lot more. But to get the health benefits that fish provides (essential fatty acids, which are important for proper brain function), you can take contaminant-free fish-oil capsules. I buy the Spectrum Essential brands.

**MEAT SUBSTITUTES:** At the ranch, we use soy protein such as Veat (veat.com). It has the same taste and texture as chicken, which is essential if you want your family to eat it. You can substitute Veat in your recipes for chicken salad, cacciatore or kabobs. For turkey dishes, we use Tofurky (tofurky.com). Instead of hot dogs, we eat Tofu Pups (lightlife.com).

**DAIRY:** Regular cow's milk can contain persistent organic pollutants (POPs), which are bioaccumulative. Among these POPs are dioxins, which are produced in the making of pesticides and in the incineration of waste, especially hospital waste and household trash (for more on this, see the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health's site, [www.jhsph.edu](http://www.jhsph.edu)). From there, dioxins leach into the food chain quite easily: cows store them in their fat; dioxins then get into their milk, which we buy and drink; and after that they get into our breast milk, which we feed our babies—that's the cycle. Organic milk shouldn't have any dioxins or pesticides, antibiotics or hormones in it. Good brands include Horizon Organic and Natural-by-Nature.

**DAIRY SUBSTITUTES:** We use Edensoy Extra milk and Soya Kaas and SoyCo soy "cheeses" at the ranch. We also use organic Original Rice Dream rice milk and Soy Dream "ice cream."

**EGGS:** Organic eggs are now available in supermarkets. (Be aware that, legally speaking, "free range" means nothing. Look for "cage-free" eggs.)

**EGG SUBSTITUTES:** When we need to at the ranch, we use Ener-G-Egg Replacer powder and Mori-Nu Silken Tofu to replace eggs in cooking. As a mayonnaise substitute, we use Veganaise. All these brands are available at health-food stores.

**GRAINS:** We use Lundberg Family Farms organic rice, including Wehani, wild, Arborio and basmati varieties. Our stone-ground whole-grain flours come from various sources; a good one is Bob's Red Mill ([bobsredmill.com](http://bobsredmill.com)).

**SWEETENERS:** Not all sweeteners are equal. The good sugars are agave nectar, stevia and maple syrup. These are sweeter than refined sugar, which is processed with chemical solvents, but have a lower impact on blood-sugar levels because they are sim-

ple, not refined, carbohydrates. On pancakes we use organic grade-B maple syrup; it's processed without formaldehyde, a carcinogen that some commercial syrups contain. There are also other sugars, such as Sucanat (dehydrated cane juice) and Sugar in the Raw (turbinado), that are organic and not bleached, as traditional sugars are.

## Hearth & Home

**CLEANING PRODUCTS:** For some reason, most people never give cleaning products any thought. They're the last things people worry about, and I think they should be among the first. The EPA lists a vast number of killer household chemicals—indoor pollutants that are hazardous to touch, breathe or ingest. They include formaldehyde; neurotoxins in air fresheners; nitrobenzene and phenol in furniture polish; ammonia, which is damaging to the lungs, skin and eyes; and chlorine bleach, whose fumes can cause severe eye and lung irritation as well as vomiting. Unfortunately, most commercial dishwasher liquids and powders contain some bleach. When mixed with hot water, they emit toxic vapors in the steam, yet people flip on their dishwashers every day with their kids standing right there. Carpet and upholstery shampoos contain substances that can damage the nerves, liver and kidneys. Drain cleaners incorporate extremely caustic ingredients such as lye.

For housecleaning in general, I recommend my line: Greening the Cleaning. The products have been tested in hospitals and have been proven to work as well as or better than the leading commercial brands. The Deirdre Imus Environmental Center is a not-for-profit organization, and proceeds from the sales of these products go toward research to better understand the environmental causes of cancer and to support the treatment of children with cancer. We currently sell only industrial size, but we plan to launch a retail line within the next six months, to benefit the Imus Ranch. The industrial line is sold at 201-336-8071 or at [dienviro.com](http://dienviro.com); the retail line will be available in stores and at [imusranchfoods.com](http://imusranchfoods.com).

In addition to my line, I highly recommend Bi-O-Kleen ([bi-o-kleen.com](http://bi-o-kleen.com)) and Ecover ([www.ecover.com](http://www.ecover.com)) products. They are also sold at health supermarkets.

**CLOTHING DETERGENTS:** For everyday laundry, I recommend Greening the Cleaning, but Bi-O-Kleen and Seventh Generation ([www.seventhgeneration.com](http://www.seventhgeneration.com)) also make good laundry liquid and nonchlorine bleach. For silks, delicates, wools and cashmere, I use Eucalan Woolwash (800-561-9731; [eucalan.com](http://eucalan.com)). You can also wash coats, dresses, curtains and even antique rugs in it. In particular, the

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lavender Eucalan is excellent at keeping moths away from stored clothes.

**WATER:** For the most thorough protection, you can install a reverse-osmosis system, which filters heavy metals and removes virtually all contaminants. Less expensive options include buying filtered water, installing a filter on your tap or using a KDF crystallized-quartz filtering system ([cleaning-guide.com](http://cleaning-guide.com) or [inspireliving.com](http://inspireliving.com)), which may be more thorough than charcoal-filter systems. For more information, consult the EPA Safe Drinking Water Hotline (800-426-4791 or 703-412-3330; [epa.gov/safe-water/wot/index](http://epa.gov/safe-water/wot/index)) or the National Resources Defense Council ([nrdc.org](http://nrdc.org)).

**COOKWARE AND FOOD STORAGE:** Teflon-coated pans contain ammonium perfluorooctanoate, or C-8, which has been linked to cancers and birth defects in animal studies. The EPA is currently reviewing the safety of Teflon-related products. The safest cookware to use is All-Clad stainless-steel pans. You should store food in glass containers with hard-plastic tops. Also, plastic wraps should never be microwaved.

**PLASTICS AND PAPER:** Instead of plastic wrap, I use unbleached wax paper. The plasticizers used in plastic wrap, such as No. 3 PVC, release chemicals that disrupt our hormones and are linked to some cancers. (Check [dienviro.com](http://dienviro.com) for information on safe plastics.) Seventh Generation makes excellent recycled paper napkins, towels and toilet tissue.

**MISCELLANEOUS HOUSEHOLD SUPPLIES:** The Gaiam catalog ([gaiam.com](http://gaiam.com)) is great. It offers everything from soaps and baby items to organic bedding and home furnishings.

**PAINTS AND BUILDING MATERIALS:** When you remodel your house, choose paints and lacquer and paint thinners that are low in volatile organic compounds (VOCs). These toxic chemicals cause indoor pollution 24/7 by “off-gassing”—emitting low levels of toxic vapors into the air from the walls, floors or furniture for years after their application. Benjamin Moore ([benjaminmoore.com](http://benjaminmoore.com)) offers low-VOC paints; American Formulating and Manufacturing ([afmsafecoat.com](http://afmsafecoat.com)) has a variety of nontoxic, zero-VOC products. Other sources of zero-VOC paints are [caliwel.com](http://caliwel.com), [devoepaint.com](http://devoepaint.com), ICI Lifemaster 2000 (800-984-5444) and Kelly Moore Enviro-Cote (916-921-0165). There are also natural paints and finishes, made from raw ingredients such as plant oils, plant dyes, essential oils and natural minerals including clay, casein, beeswax and earth dyes (for information, visit [milkpaint.com](http://milkpaint.com), [bioshieldpaint.com](http://bioshieldpaint.com) and [aurousa.com](http://aurousa.com)). In your backyard avoid installing play equipment, decks or fences made of pressure-treated wood, which can contain CCA, an arsenic that is a carcinogen. If you already have a deck or equipment that you suspect contains

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arsenic, seal it with a product from [afmsafecoat.com](http://afmsafecoat.com).

**LAWN CARE:** At the ranch, we take a biodynamic-farming approach. For composting we use a spray called Kritter Spritz ([kritterspritz.com](http://kritterspritz.com) or [happy-planet.com](http://happy-planet.com)), a culture of good microbes that eat all the bad ones. After we spray the compost pile, it takes only days, not weeks, to break down. Since conventional lawn

fertilizers and weed killers contain toxic ingredients, I recommend getting gardening supplies from Aggrand ([www.guarding-our-earth.com/aggrand/fertilizer](http://www.guarding-our-earth.com/aggrand/fertilizer)); Extremely Green Gardening Co. ([extremelygreen.com](http://extremelygreen.com)); NaturaLawn of America ([www.nl-amer.com](http://www.nl-amer.com)); and Nutri-Lawn ([nutri-lawn.com](http://nutri-lawn.com)).

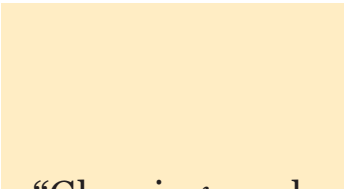
**PEST CONTROL:** Many studies link pesticide use to higher levels of cancer in children and adults who are directly exposed. In particular, flea and roach bombs release carcinogens that linger in the air. Even flea collars are toxic for pets and for the child who touches them and puts his hands in his mouth. Tell your exterminators you don’t want them to spray anything toxic in your house. To find out what they should use, go to [beyondpesticides.org](http://beyondpesticides.org).

**MERCURY:** It’s not just fish that contain mercury; another source of exposure is hospital equipment. Mercury is present in some household products, too, including fluorescent lightbulbs and neon lights, some contact-lens solutions and even children’s sneakers (those with flashing lights). When bulbs break, mercury is released, just as it is when coal is burned, another way that mercury poisons our environment. Ask your local authorities (or visit [epa.gov](http://epa.gov)) for information on the appropriate disposal of products that contain mercury.

**LEAD:** Lead poisoning causes irreversible nervous-system and brain damage that results in decreased intelligence, behavioral abnormalities and learning disabilities. The hazards of lead in old paint, plumbing and buildings are well known but are still cause for concern. To reduce lead and other impurities in drinking water, let the cold water run for at least thirty seconds before using it. Costume jewelry can also contain lead; it’s supposed to be labeled, but that law is not always enforced. Lead has also been found in the cords of some vacuums and digital cameras. Read the safety instructions before buying such items. Check with the Consumer Products Safety Commission (800-638-2772; [cpsc.gov](http://cpsc.gov)) to get a list of all household products that may contain lead.

## Clothing & Textiles

**TEXTILES:** In the textile industry, toxic chemicals are part of every step of production, from pesticides sprayed on cotton crops to carcinogenic chemicals like dioxins and toxic dyes used



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in manufacturing. It takes three-quarters of a pound of pesticides and synthetic fertilizers to make one pair of blue jeans or a cotton bedsheet. If you apply that ratio to all of the cotton that we use—bed, bath, clothes—that’s a lot of pesticides!

If you want to buy organic cotton, look closely at the labels. An organic towel or sheet is made of certified-organic cotton grown without pesticides or fungicides, but the fabric might have been treated with toxic chemicals during its manufacture. “Natural” or “green” cotton hasn’t been treated with formaldehyde or chlorine but might have been grown using pesticides. Ideally, buy a fabric labeled “organically grown and manufactured.” (For more information, visit the Organic Trade Association Web site, [ota.com](http://ota.com).)

Even if a fabric is organic, that’s not enough for me. It also has to be aesthetically comparable to the fabrics I already buy and competitive in price. Coyuchi ([coyuchiorganic.com](http://coyuchiorganic.com)) offers a nice line of organic fabrics printed with nontoxic dyes. The Gaiam catalog carries organic fabrics as well ([gaiam.com](http://gaiam.com)).

**CLOTHES:** Giorgio Armani designs organic-denim jeans and organic-cotton knitwear, and Serfontaine ([serfontaine.com](http://serfontaine.com)) makes beautiful organic jeans. Katharine Hamnett, Balenciaga and H&M have used organic or recycled fabrics, and Deborah Hampton created a 100 percent certified-organic collection last spring. But if you buy organic pants with no dyes and then wash them in a detergent that’s loaded with toxins, you’re fooling yourself. You need to use nontoxic laundry products as well.

**DRY CLEANING:** The vast majority of dry-cleaning facilities use the toxic solvent chemical perchloroethylene (PERC), which has been linked to nerve, liver and kidney damage and cancer. On the rare occasion when I need to dry-clean something, I take it to a nontoxic cleaner. You can check for facilities that use healthier alternatives (liquefied silicone or patented liquid carbon dioxide) at [greenearthcleaning.com](http://greenearthcleaning.com) and [hangersdrycleaners.com](http://hangersdrycleaners.com). If you do take your clothes to a conventional dry cleaner, remove the plastic right away after picking them up, and air them out (preferably outdoors) for several hours.

## Cosmetics & Personal Care

**SKIN CARE:** Dr. Hauschka Skin Care ([drhauschka.com](http://drhauschka.com)) makes excellent products that are free of synthetics, toxic dyes, petroleum products, artificial preservatives and other harmful synthetic chemicals. It’s holistic skin care at its best. Jurlique ([jurlique.com](http://jurlique.com)) has a philosophy similar to Dr. Hauschka’s.

Susan Ciminelli ([susanciminelli.com](http://susanciminelli.com)) makes skin-care products that contain no synthetic chemicals, preservatives, dyes or petroleum products. Her Marine lotion is excellent for invigorating your skin; it contains oil of algae and essential oils of cypress, juniper and marjoram. The Algae fine powder is great

to add to your bath; it helps to eliminate toxins and calms the mind. Other favorites are organic products from Farmaesthetics ([farmaesthetics.com](http://farmaesthetics.com)), especially the Solar Salt mineral baths, and Naturopathica ([naturopathica.com](http://naturopathica.com)).

**SHAMPOO:** Children: Nontoxic baby lines are available from Jurlique; Weleda

([weleda.com](http://weleda.com)); California Baby ([californiababy.com](http://californiababy.com)), which also has terrific aromatherapy bubble bath; and J.R. Liggett ([jrliggett.com](http://jrliggett.com)). Liggett’s Old-Fashioned shampoo has no sodium laurel sulfate (SLS), which can irritate the skin, and it comes in a bar. The shampoos used to treat head lice typically contain pesticides no different from those we spray on bugs. There are healthy alternatives: you can buy them at an organic-food supermarket or make one at home. (Check [licenders.com](http://licenders.com) or “Jesse’s Project” on [dienviro.com](http://dienviro.com) or [headlice.org](http://headlice.org).) Adults: I use Avalon Organics’ SLS-free shampoos and conditioners; they contain organic botanicals, such as lavender and jojoba oil ([avalonnaturalproducts.com](http://avalonnaturalproducts.com)). Also, check out Life Tree ([lifetreeorganics.com](http://lifetreeorganics.com)), Aubrey Organics (especially its Honey-suckle Rose shampoo; [aubrey-organics.com](http://aubrey-organics.com)) and Maine Coast Herbals ([maineherbs.com](http://maineherbs.com)). Maine Coast’s nettle shampoo is great for reinvigorating the hair of postmenopausal women.

**SOAP:** J.R. Liggett’s bar soap is an awesome hand soap as well as a shampoo—and it’s a great buy. Truebodycare.com also carries a beautiful new organic body-care line of soaps and shampoos called Raining Rose (there’s a vegan line as well).

**DEODORANT:** For a deodorant that works but doesn’t contain parabens, aluminum and other toxic chemicals, I highly recommend Avalon Organics’ lemon-verbena deodorant. Aubrey Organics makes a pretty good product; so do Kiss My Face ([www.kissmyface.com](http://www.kissmyface.com)) and Nature’s Gate ([levlad.com](http://levlad.com)).

**TOOTHPASTE:** When my son, Wyatt, was a baby, I made sure he used a natural antimicrobial toothpaste from Weleda or Dr. Gary Young. But my dentist says that organic toothpaste doesn’t prevent cavities or protect the teeth as well as nonorganic, so now that Wyatt is past the stage of eating toothpaste, we go back and forth between Crest and Colgate and Dr. Young’s Dentarome toothpaste, made with essential oils ([webdeb.com/oils/young](http://webdeb.com/oils/young)).

**SUNSCREEN:** No sunscreen is completely nontoxic. Aubrey Organics’ Green Tea sunblock for children UVA/UVB Full Spectrum (SPF 25) and Dr. Hauschka’s sunscreen cream for children (SPF 22) are the only ones I’d recommend for kids, and I use them too. I also use Jurlique’s SPF 30 sunscreen.

**PERFUME:** Toluene, a chemical solvent the EPA designates as hazardous waste, is found in many fragrances (and some cleaning products). Toluene can cause headaches, irritated eyes and memory loss. Nottoopretty.com lists the perfumes and cosmetics that contain toxic chemicals like toluene, and those that don’t. ❖