



**Anticancer**  
LIFESTYLE PROGRAM



# **CREATING A HEALTHY, NON-TOXIC NURSERY**

**BY DEBORAH DE MOULPIED**

ANTICANCER LIFESTYLE ENVIRONMENT EXPERT



So you just found out that you are going to be a parent or a grandparent.

**Congratulations!** Now starts the fun of readying the nursery for the new arrival. It's hard to choose from the dizzying array of products you find, as you weigh price, functionality, space considerations, and need. But what about health? Is that even something you need to factor in as you make your decisions?

Recently, a health-conscious friend of mine became a first-time, can't-wait grandmother. As she searched online for items her son and daughter-in-law

would need, it didn't take her long to become exasperated at the vague product information and varied safety claims. Since I created the Environment module of the [Anticancer Lifestyle Program](#), my friend figured I would know how to help her sort through this tangled thicket of products and claims. I got the frantic phone call: "What does this certification mean? Is it legit? Is there a way to be sure this car seat is non-toxic?"

These are the kinds of questions you may be wondering about as well, so let's address them.

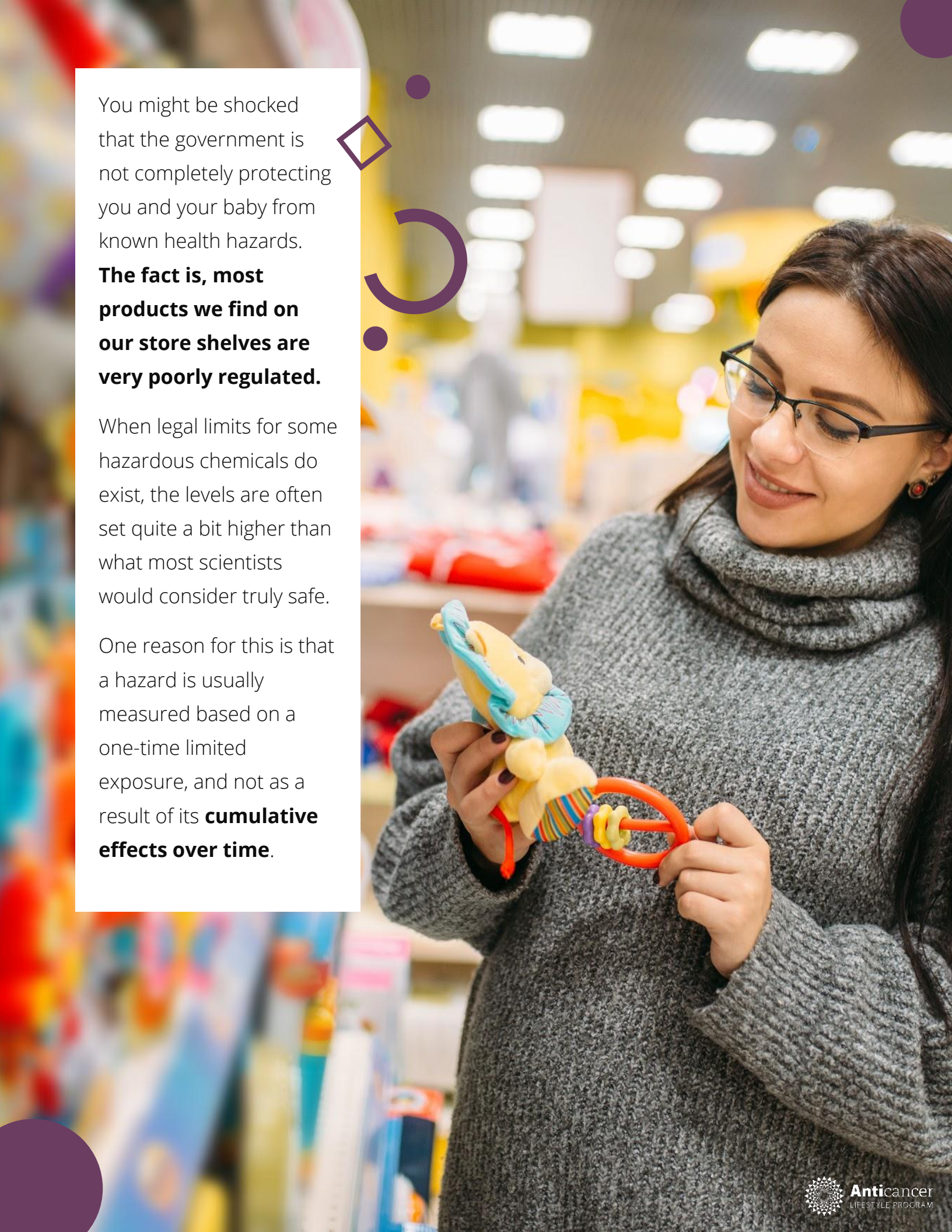




To get started, you'll often see baby products labeled as **"non-toxic"**, or conversely, you'll run into items that detractors label as **"toxic"**. There are no formal, legal definitions of these terms when it comes to consumer products. Most products made for babies are neither completely pure nor completely noxious.

When considering products to purchase, it's important to remember that as small and rapidly developing beings, babies may be more affected than adults by even low concentrations of toxic chemicals.





You might be shocked that the government is not completely protecting you and your baby from known health hazards.

**The fact is, most products we find on our store shelves are very poorly regulated.**

When legal limits for some hazardous chemicals do exist, the levels are often set quite a bit higher than what most scientists would consider truly safe.

One reason for this is that a hazard is usually measured based on a one-time limited exposure, and not as a result of its **cumulative effects over time.**



## HERE'S A QUICK, ROUGH FORMULA YOU CAN USE WHEN WEIGHING THE RELATIVE HEALTH RISK OF ANY GIVEN PRODUCT:

# RISK =

DEGREE OF HAZARD  
X  
EXPOSURE TIME

Applying this formula will guide you away from products that are best avoided. As an example of how to use this formula, let's take a deep dive into one common nursery item: **the crib.**

While the US government does regulate the physical characteristics of cribs (ie, the distance between slats), there is very little regulation concerning toxicity in crib components.



Typically, cribs are made of **pressed wood**, and crib mattresses are usually made of **polyurethane foam** and covered with **vinyl**.

Your baby will spend a lot of time sleeping in the crib, over a couple of years, which equals lots of exposure time.

Pressed wood contains glues that can emit **toxic compounds, known as “volatile organic compounds” or VOCs**.

These chemicals evaporate easily at room temperature in a process known as “off-gassing”.





What about the **mattress**? [A 2014 study](#) found many VOCs were emitted from polyurethane crib mattresses. Some of these VOCs, such as benzene, toluene, and formaldehyde, increase the risk of **asthma and allergies**, along with **skin and eye irritation**.

In addition, **many crib mattresses contain flame retardants**, which are highly toxic chemicals. As to the vinyl cover: **vinyl is considered the worst of plastics** in terms of off-gassing several toxic VOCs, including phthalates, which are known hormone-disrupting chemicals.

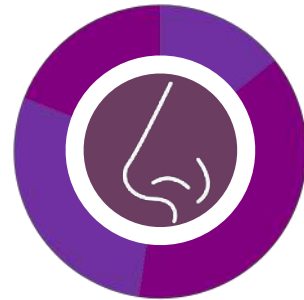
Referring back to our formula, a standard crib doesn't fare well, as your baby will have a lot of exposure time to many different chemicals of concern.

So, what to do? Solid wood cribs with wool mattresses are not only hard to find, but they are expensive. Let's face it, very few people can afford to buy everything brand new, all organic, or with the best certifications. That's why I urge you to **consider the relative risk** as you gauge where it's worth spending top dollar, if needed, to avoid toxic exposures.





IN GENERAL, THESE ARE  
THE ROUTES OF BABY'S  
EXPOSURE I RECOMMEND  
FOCUSING ON:



## NOSE

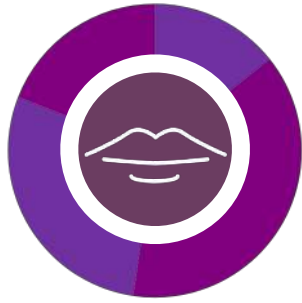
Other than sleeping a lot, babies also breathe a lot! Air can contain little bits of stuff—such as microplastics, dirt, soot, and dust—that are so small they float. Many chemicals attach to dust, like flame retardants.

This is one reason why **choosing natural, untreated products** versus synthetics and plastics (that often shed tiny particles) is a better choice. VOCs from flame retardants, fragrances, cleaning products, paints, cooking, oven cleaning, dry cleaning, and plastics like vinyl are released from all sorts of products.

**No plug-in air fresheners in the nursery!** Try to keep the air truly fresh.

I also put electromagnetic fields, or EMFs, in the air category. A baby's principal exposure to these would most likely come from baby monitors. Monitors have become quite sophisticated, which unfortunately means greater exposure to EMFs. Because monitors are used mostly when a baby sleeps, the exposure time can add up. **Low emission analog type monitors are the safest but they don't include video.** Sometimes we can't have it all.





# MOUTH

Babies put a lot of things in their mouths! If the baby uses a pacifier or a teether, that means a lot of contact time. These products, especially those made of plastic, can leach chemicals. I suggest using **natural latex rubber nipples** and **pacifiers**. Teethers and rattles made from untreated wood are fine. Silicone is okay, but the research on this is not extensive. **Avoid plastics.**





## SKIN

Now that you have the hang of the risk formula, here's a question: Which would you consider a greater priority for clean ingredients—shampoo or body lotion?


### **Body lotion it is!**

Body lotion often stays on the skin until the next bath, while shampoo is rinsed within seconds. Besides the obvious products like shampoos, lotions, oils, soaps, and powders, many other

chemicals and compounds can enter through the skin.

Some residues from laundry soaps, dryer sheets, clothing or sheets can enter the body. The bare skin rubbing up against a car seat laden with flame retardants and stain-proof chemicals (PFASs) can absorb these toxic chemicals. **Even some VOCs in the air can enter through the skin.**





We don't have definitive answers about how these exposures may affect future health.

But we do know that cancer rates and noncommunicable diseases in children **are rising** and that the environment has a role in this.

So we do the best we can **to lower the risk** by choosing safer products while considering contact time.

When deciding on specific products to invest more money in, think about a day in the life of your baby, and where principal exposures may occur.

## CONSIDER THESE AREAS:



### SAFE SLEEPING

If you have limited funds, the mattress is the most important product to consider buying organic if you can. Cribs should be solid wood as pressed wood can emit formaldehyde (a carcinogen) for up to 2 years. [This website](#) gives a ton of detail about how to select the most chemically safe crib.

**Avoid flame retardants, stain repellents, and waterproofing.**

Organic bedding, mattress covers, pillows, and sleepwear can be found at very reasonable prices even at places like Target. Always wash in hot water before using.





# IN THE MOUTHS OF BABES



Consider your baby's pacifiers, rattles, teething items, toys (almost all go in the mouth), bottle nipples and sippy cups.

Once your baby starts eating, make every effort **to buy or make organic baby food.**

Foods should be purchased and/or stored in glass. Never microwave foods in plastic. Glass bottles are preferred.

**Say no to plastics and non-stick cookware.**



# SAVE THE SKIN

Prioritize lotions, oils, powders, laundry soaps, and diapers when looking for clean ingredients. Since babies are in diapers virtually all the time, their exposure time is significant. [Healthynest](#) diapers are made without VOCs, BPA, phthalates, parabens, chlorine, or fragrance.

Also consider shampoos, soaps, and sunscreens.

**The more organic ingredients** and fewer number of products and ingredients overall, the better.





# TRAVEL AND PLAY SAFE

Car seats, strollers, infant carriers, bouncy swings, and activity items are often doused with flame retardants and/or stain repellents that are **best avoided** if possible.

# BREATHE FREE

**Keeping your air clean** can be a challenge. Start with opening windows for a good air exchange.

Take your shoes off when entering the home. Do not use fragrances—even natural ones can be irritating to undeveloped lungs.

Use a vent whenever you cook. Do not clean your oven with the self-cleaning mode; use natural cleaners like baking soda paste. (Yes, it does work.)

Reduce VOCs from pressed wood, furniture with polyurethane and formaldehyde, vinyl shower curtains, carpeting, PVC toys, dry-cleaning, cleaners, vinyl flooring, paints, and coatings.

**Now is not the time to do big painting projects and home remodeling. Vacuum with good HEPA filters or a central vac. Dust frequently; use a microfiber cloth.**





## HELPFUL RESOURCES

While quality baby products can be expensive, it is possible to prepare your nursery with excellent, safe products at reasonable cost. **The secondhand market** is alive and well. Lightly used big ticket items can be found online, use eBay or Facebook. Or think vintage—which is a great way to reuse and recycle—but remember to keep government safety standards in mind, especially when it comes to cribs.

Above all, **more is not better**. Fewer, quality items are better than a lot of—well, you know.

Reliable resources can help you through this process. While you could just google “top organic baby mattresses”, I prefer not to rely on blogs that list items they profit from via the click-throughs (yes, this is a thing). To me, that’s a conflict of interest.

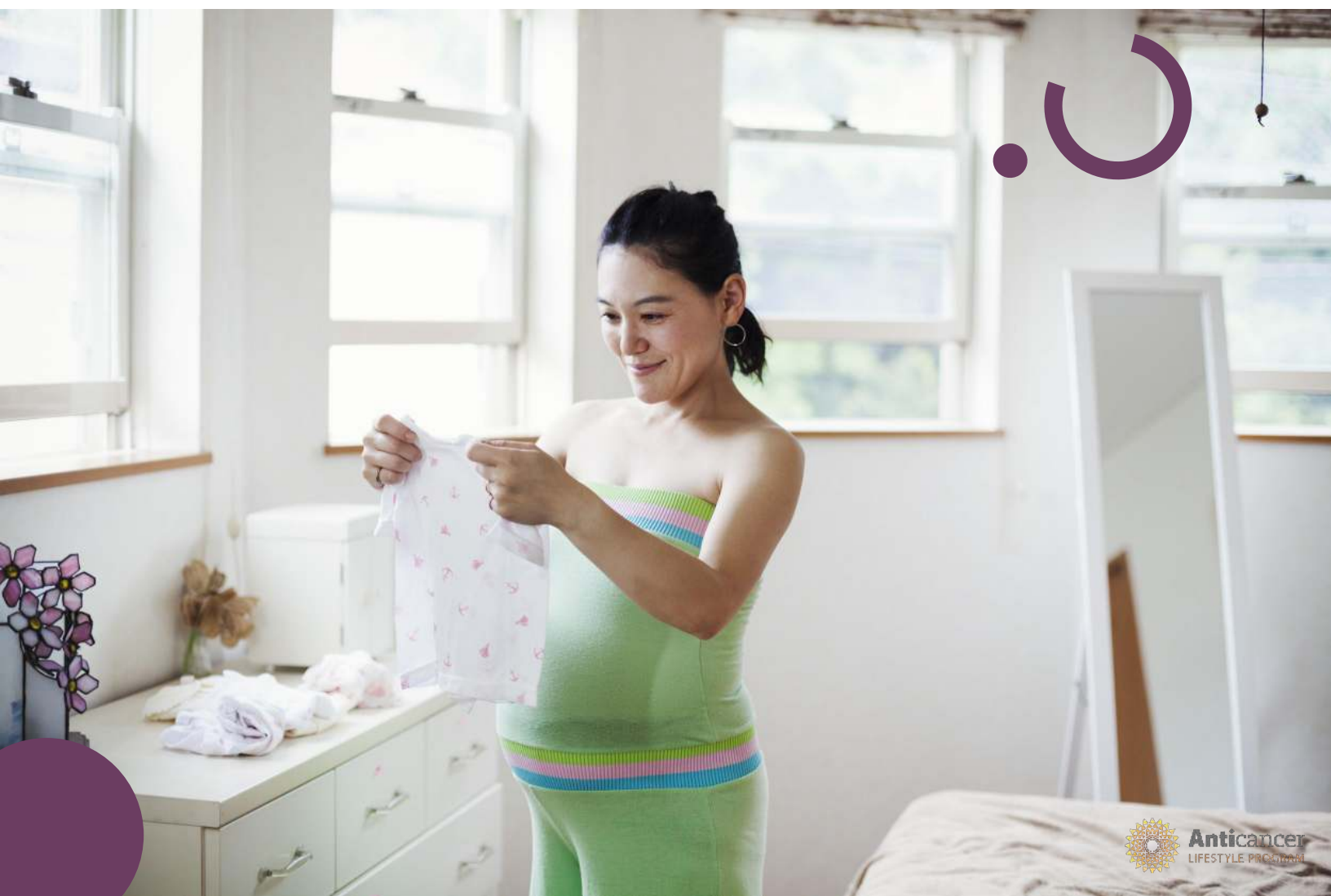
In general, I prefer to buy products from companies that have health “baked into” their mission.

For example, [Naturepedic](#) makes only organic/nontoxic mattresses, including crib mattresses, though they are expensive.

While you are searching for healthy products, you might notice that many have certifications. Some of these are better than others.

**The best certifications to look for are USDA Certified Organic, GOTS for textiles, and GOLS for latex.** I

consider **Oeko-Tex** to be good but note that it is not certified organic—just guaranteed free from hazardous substances. **Forget GreenGuard Gold and CertiPUR-US. These have weak standards** that still allow a certain amount of VOCs, toluene, benzene and formaldehyde (these last two are known carcinogens) in the products they certify.







**Avoid products with the precautionary California Prop 65**

**warning label** which alerts you to the presence of chemicals of concern in the product. If you must paint, look for paints labeled “No-VOCs”. Low-VOC paints still off-gas too many chemicals into the air.

**It’s common to feel overwhelmed by this subject. But with the knowledge you’ve gained and the resources available, you can now begin thinking about creating your healthy, non-toxic nursery.**

## HERE ARE SOME NON-TOXIC BABY PRODUCT SITES YOU CAN CONSIDER USING:

- Womenvoices.org, a non-profit, has [a great list of tips](#) to help create a non-toxic environment for your baby. They also have a helpful [reference list of chemicals to avoid](#) that are commonly found in baby products.
- [Saferchemicals.org](#) is a great place to go to find lists of healthy baby products that have been compiled from other non-profits.
- Madesafe.org also has [a good list of chemicals to avoid](#), as well as [a purchasing guide](#) for safe baby products, though note that the companies paid Made Safe for their safety evaluations.
- Healthy Babies, Bright Future, [www.hbbf.org](http://www.hbbf.org) is a terrific and thorough resource for vetting products. They often suggest companies but do not link to them. The site goes beyond infant care and is a great learning tool as well.
- The Environmental Working Group, [www.EWG.org](http://www.EWG.org), is another great resource. They have 3 large and powerful databases: one that enables you to check the safety of [personal care products](#), another for vetting [cleaning products](#), and yet another where you can find out [what is in your tap water](#) (which you may decide to filter). Also see their [Guide to Safer Diapers](#) to learn about toxic chemicals to watch out for in diapers.







# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

## Deborah de Moulpied

Is a Green Living expert. She created the Environment module of the [Anticancer Lifestyle Program](#), a free, evidence-based online course in lifestyle change for cancer survivors and those interested in the prevention of chronic illness. Deborah has a Master's degree in Education and was the founder of an environmental green goods store in New Hampshire.