

**Peggy Wolff, M.S., R.N.C.S.  
Healthy People & Healthy Places  
126 Cave Hill Road  
Leverett, MA 01054**

## **Health Effects of Fragrances**

*Do you know anyone who is bothered by fragrances?* You probably do because more than 20 % of our population now experience adverse health effects when exposed to fragrances.

*Why are fragrances such a problem?* For two reasons: First, because 95% of fragrances are synthetic compounds made from petroleum products most of which have never been tested for human toxicity. Secondly, fragrances are made to be volatile so the chemicals in these fragrances stay in the air and are readily inhaled or absorbed through the skin.

*Are “natural” scents a problem?* People who don’t feel well around synthetic fragrances generally don’t feel well around some essential “natural” oils such as civet, galbanum, and, in particular, patchouli oil.

*What health effects can occur from fragrances?* Minor effects include eye, nose, and throat irritation, dry, cracking skin, rashes, and headaches. More serious health effects include: vertigo, fatigue, nausea and vomiting, kidney and liver damage, blood pressure changes, central and peripheral nervous system changes, difficulty breathing, and in rare cases, death.

*Who is particularly bothered by fragrances?* People with allergies, asthma, compromised or immature immune systems, and those who are chemically sensitive are most susceptible. Be aware that fragrances are a “barrier to access” for some health conditions under the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1992.

*If you avoid wearing perfume/cologne, are you free of fragrances?* Probably not. Fragrances are in almost all personal care and laundry products that most of us commonly use.

*Did you know that . . . . .*

- \* Fragrances are one of today's major sources of indoor air pollution.
- \* Fragrances, although under FDA jurisdiction, are one of the least regulated substances.
- \* Some fragrances contain chemicals designated as hazardous waste disposal chemicals such as methyl chloride, toluene, and ethanol.
- \* Some towns/cities like Shutesbury, Massachusetts and Halifax, Nova Scotia have banned the use of fragrances.
- \* Secondhand smells are as much a problem as secondhand smoke.
- \* Some products labeled "unscented" may contain toxic "masking" fragrances.

*What can I do?*

1. Avoid the use of synthetic fragrances and selected essential oils when at work or in public places.
2. Request fragrance free classes, meetings, conferences, etc.
3. Educate other health care professionals, clients, and the general public about the adverse health effects of fragrances.
4. If a particular fragrance is bothersome to you, speak up!
5. Subscribe to magazines that refrain from using fragrance inserts.
6. Write to the Office of Cosmetics and Colors, FDA, Washington D.C. 20204 about any problems with fragrances and scented products.

*What products should I purchase? FF=fragrance free HFS-health food store*

**Bar Soaps:** Dr. Bronner's, Granny's Old Fashioned, Kiss My Face Pure Olive Oil (HFS), Clearly Natural Unscented (HFS)  
**Liquid Soaps:** NutriBiotic Skin Cleanser Fragrance Free (HFS), Nature's Gate Antiseptic with Peppermint oil, Tea Tree Oil & extract of lemon (HFS)  
**Shampoos:** Ivory Unscented, Magick Botanicals, Stony Brook, Tom's Aloe & Almond, ShiKai Henna Gold  
**Conditioners:** Magic Botanicals, ShiKai Henna Gold, Simple.  
**Gel:** Magic Botanicals (HFS), KMS Puritive 100% FF & Color Free (Regency-Amherst)  
**Lotions/Oils/Jelly:** Simple (NEEDS), Shea Butter Unscented (B & C), Granny's Old Fashioned (NEEDS), Kiss My Face FF Olive & Aloe Moisturizer (CVS), plain Olive Oil (grocery store), Unpetroleum Jelly-Original Formula (Autumn Harp),  
**Shaving lotion:** Kiss My Face Moisture Shave FF (HFS)  
**Deoderants:** Mineral Crystal (HFS)  
**Laundry Detergents:** Ecover (HFS), All Free & Clear, Arm and Hammer, Tide Free  
**Laundry Dryer Sheets:** Unscented dryer sheet-perfume and color free

*You don't have to go to a health food store to buy fragrance free products. Local drug stores and grocery stores carry fragrance free products: READ THE LABELS: fragrances are usually the last ingredient listed.*

*\*\*Some of the suggested products contain fragrances; however, these products usually are well tolerated.*

*Check out this web site for more information: [www.fpinva.org](http://www.fpinva.org) (Fragrance Product Information Network, Betty Bridges, R.N.*

*Peggy Wolff, M.S., R.N.C.S. is the Director of [Healthy People & Healthy Places](http://Healthy People & Healthy Places), which provides advocacy, counseling, and educational services related to complex health conditions including environmental health issues. She can be reached at 413-367-9638 or email at [PeggyWolff@healthypeoplehealthyplaces.com](mailto:PeggyWolff@healthypeoplehealthyplaces.com).*