

Air Freshener – Aerosol, Block Type and Wick Type

The term 'air freshener' is really a contradiction in terms when applied to most commercially available products sold as air fresheners. Air fresheners work either by using a nerve-deadening agent which interferes with the ability to smell, or by covering up one smell with another. Many products contain chemicals that do anything but freshen the air. They can contain a complex mixture of chemicals, including synthetic fragrances that are considered to be one of the major causes of allergic reactions in people. Some contain chemicals that have an anaesthetic, nerve-deadening effect or coat olfactory nerves in the nasal passages so we cannot detect offending odours; a bit like painting over a rusty gate so we no longer see the damage being done. These products can also contain hazardous chemicals known to have adverse effects on human health.

Apart from the chemical ingredients of air fresheners, many of which are released to contribute to indoor air pollution, other chemicals can be formed as a result of the reaction between the ingredients and ozone in the air. Formaldehyde is formed when terpenes such as limonene and linalool react with ozone, adding to the formaldehyde released from carpets, fabrics, furnishings, plywood, pressed wood and insulation materials.

A study by the University of Bristol in the UK called 'Children of the 90s', which has followed the health and development of 14,000 children since before birth, found that 32 per cent more babies suffered diarrhoea in homes where air fresheners were used every day, compared with homes where they were used once a week or less. They also had significantly more earaches in these homes as well. And the babies weren't the only ones affected. Mothers who used air fresheners daily suffered nearly 10 per cent more headaches. Perhaps most alarming is the finding that women who lived in homes with daily air freshener use had more than a 25 per cent increased risk of depression.

Common symptoms associated with the use of air fresheners include headache, dizziness, blurred vision, nausea and vomiting.

Safer Alternatives

Good ventilation reduces the need for air fresheners.

Potted plants and cut flowers such as roses add natural floral scents to the air.

Place small containers of baking soda in places where odours accumulate.

Add a couple of drops of essential oil to cotton wool and place around the house.