

# Daycare without the chemicals <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS:

I have huge concerns about the chemicals my daughter's daycare uses. How do I get the centre to support green changes?

You might go your whole life stewing in chemicals and breathing in toxins and, quite frankly, not give a bleep. But the moment a baby pops onto the scene, many otherwise nonchalant folks become strident environmentalists.

No doubt reports that newborns come into this world with over 200 chemicals in their umbilical cord (yep, you heard me) send parental jaws to the floor. And, yes, you can try your damndest to purge your home of dodgy substances and green your child's diet, but what happens when that child is in someone else's hands for, oh, a third of their day?

Well, depending on the daycare, your kid could be munching on chemically enhanced processed/frozen/canned food, then crawling on off-gassing vinyl floors cleaned with questionable substances.

But just like your toddler, a number of childcare centres are gradually learning new ways of doing things. Take the city of Toronto centres - long slammed for doling out a pretty sad menu (like canned fruit instead of living fruit, and trans-fat-drenched fried beef patties).

Luckily, campaigning by groups like the Better Daycare Food Network and Local Food Plus has led to improvements. Trans fats are gone, you'll find more real fruit and less mercury-heavy tuna salad, and Toronto city council agreed to guarantee that 10 per cent of food served in these and other public institutions would be locally sourced.

But daycares serviced by Real Food for Real Kids (RFRK), like those at most YMCAs, all eight WoodGreen childcare centres and a good 25 indie centres are seriously kicking ass.

Local Food Plus-certified RFRK specializes in serving up 100 per cent natural, homemade, chemical-free, whole grain snacks and lunches, loaded with organic and local content. All meat is naturally raised, and cooking water is triple-filtered. Plus, RFRK is now moving away from plastic containers to reusable stainless steel.

And plenty of daycares have gone beyond just greening their bellies. WoodGreen's childcare centres disinfect with all-natural thyme-based Benefect (the only natural product okayed by Health Canada for use in daycares and hospitals). YMCA's early childcare centres forbid asthma-irritating bleach, stay away from plastics containing hormone-disrupting bisphenol A and stick to non-toxic art supplies. They're also switching to natural playgrounds (with fallen-log stools instead of those arsenic-laced pressure-treated wood playsets Environmental Defence found in schoolyards just five years ago).

A few schools are straight A (or E) students. Toronto Waldorf School preschool kids munch on organic snacks and play with natural plastic-free toys in a building equipped with a grey water recycling system, high-efficiency windows, low-VOC paints and composting bins that end up feeding the on-campus organic farm. They're even building an off-the-grid solar-panelled yurt. Makes me want to be three again.

Not that any of these facilities are perfect. The YMCA peeps admit most of their centres are cleaned with whatever is used by the janitors at the facilities they're attached to. And WoodGreen reps say the bulk of their toys aren't as green as they'd like. But more and more schools are shifting off automatic pilot, because, well, more parents keep demanding it.

That growing grumble is also why the Toronto Coalition for Better Child Care is launching a pilot greening program in 12 indie childcare centres called Growing Up Green. Among other goals, it aims to eliminate toxins in everything from plastic toys to idling cars dropping Tommy and Britney off out front.

If you're looking to quiz a prospective centre on its practices, check out [Healthyenvironmentforkids.ca](http://Healthyenvironmentforkids.ca) or the Oregon Environmental Council ([oeconline.org](http://oeconline.org)). Your particular daycare might resist swathing children's bums in cloth diapers. It might insist on sticking with bleach or disposable cutlery or something else that drives you totally bananas. And really, there's only one thing you can do each and every time: put up a fight.

Try to find like-minded parents, link arms and get vocal. Hell, you can even throw an adult-size tantrum if you like. I won't call the Supernanny on you.

-reprinted from NOW Toronto

**Region:** Ontario <sup>[2]</sup>

**Tags:** quality <sup>[3]</sup>

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