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Photography  
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THIS WEEK I...  
detox my apartment\*

It may not be evident from where you sit, but I'm experiencing slow death by canned lima beans. I've been eating a stack lately, in seemingly benign ways – tossed through stews, in soups. It was bound to catch up with me. And, if it doesn't, my efficient Capricornian habit of freezing said meals in plastic containers ready for convenient reheating on busy weeknights most certainly will.

On Friday, I invited "building biologist" and naturopath Nicole Bijlsma to do a toxicology report on my two-bedroom apartment. A building biologist takes a holistic look at the potential toxins in a living environment. Bijlsma spent three hours examining the way I live using a bunch of beeping devices. The report card came back: a veritable marinade of toxins. Everything from the pot plant in my bedroom (a fungal breeding ground) to my lip balm habit is taxing my system.

Our bodies are great detoxers, says Bijlsma, but the sheer quantity of pollutants we collide with now has pushed us to our limits. And when we tip, a host of possible illnesses –

cancer, ADHD, autoimmune diseases, fertility issues – may crop up, with no obvious cause.

Oh. Dear. But what's more oh-deary for you: the feeling that, once again, you can't do anything right these days (I mean, canned lima beans...)? Or the fact that your gut has kind of known things weren't right for a while and you've ignored it?

This week, I trawled through the highly charged debates about what damage pollutants do. And the evidence, while not conclusive, is trickling in: Canada has outlawed baby bottles made from plastics containing BPA (bisphenol A); a chemical, PFOA, used in the production of Teflon, is being phased out in response to pressure from consumer advocates; and the US National Academy of Sciences says a combination of genes plus neurotoxicants from everyday pollutants may account for nearly 25 per cent of developmental problems in children.

It's the long-term, cumulative effects that matter here. Most of the opposing research focuses on short-term effects and is often funded by – sigh – big chemical or telco companies. Until more men fall victim to prostate disease, more kids are afflicted with ADHD and more women fail to fall pregnant, I'm choosing to go with my gut. And it says, listen up.

So, back to the lima beans. Bijlsma says most food cans are lined with a membrane containing BPA, a possible hormone disrupter. And canned tuna? Environmental activist Bruce Lourie, author of *Slow Death by Rubber Duck*, ate it for three days and more than doubled his mercury levels.

Do you store your food in plastic, too? Okay, all is not lost. Look for the number in the little triangle on your containers and remember this mantra: keep one, two, four and five – the rest contain known potential health hazards. And never freeze or microwave plastic. Non-stick pans? Turf them, especially if they're scratched. My microwave is a disgrace; that door mesh doesn't do a thing, as Bijlsma's beeper demonstrated when it screamed at me. Which makes me despair for my brain wiring. So does news my wireless router could be affecting my immune system. Bijlsma rattles off instructions: stand 1.5 metres from your microwave when it's on, don't use a cordless phone and limit mobile phone use.

On the upside, my Ikea couch doesn't contain flame retardants (those Swedes are so onto it).

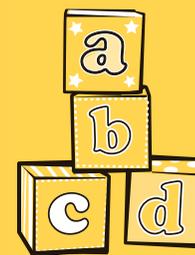
Now I'm bracing myself for the sceptics who'll claim I've been hoodwinked. I counter with two words: hand sanitiser. For me, it embodies our predicament. Studies are emerging to show some alcohol-free types may be contributing to bacterial resistance, that it doesn't work and we don't need it. We're just told we do, says Bruce Lourie ... by campaigns funded by chemical manufacturers.

But don't take my word for it. If you want to know more, go to [buildingbiology.com.au](http://buildingbiology.com.au). And make up your own mind.

\* Each week in this column I try out ways to make life more meaningful, happier, sweeter. It's an experimental journey.

Things  
you  
should  
know  
by  
KATE DUTHIE  
now...

HOW TO TEACH  
YOUR KIDS TO PLAY  
ON THEIR OWN



Kids are tricky customers. Just when you think you're in the clear, they pull you back in.

For the early months or years, when your first child has you to him- or herself, you have the time to lie on the floor and play tickles, build blocks, read books and dress up as Shrek.

But with the arrival of additional children, your attention is divided. Never mind, you can kill two birds with one stone if, instead of dividing yourself, you encourage them to play together. In the meantime, you need a life.

Along with everything else we teach our children, they need to be taught how to play. Playing alone, or with other kids without your presence, builds confidence and problem-solving skills.

Make sure your children have a comfortable, safe place and stock it with toys that are fun, colourful and interesting. Show them how to use the toys or explain the rules of games, and play with them. Then leave the room for a few minutes, returning to play some more.

Keep this up for several days, making the time you are out of the room longer each day. Make sure you check in periodically to reassure them you're around and to help with any problems that could distract them from play.

Once this routine is established, rotate the toys and books regularly so they don't become boring or repetitive. Use toy libraries for this or exchange toys with friends.

And, most important of all, no more unprotected sex.

EVERYTHING FROM  
THE POT PLANT IN  
MY BEDROOM (A  
FUNGAL BREEDING  
GROUND) TO MY LIP  
BALM HABIT IS  
TAXING MY SYSTEM.

Who,  
What,  
Wear

By  
NINA KARNIKOWSKI



**A BLAIR IN THERE**  
Michael Sheen is back doing what he does best: playing former British prime minister Tony Blair. This time, the star of *The Queen* will feature opposite Dennis Quaid, who plays Bill Clinton, in *The Special Relationship*. In cinemas on Thursday.



**DESIGNER ART**  
Sydney artist Dorryce Rock will exhibit a series of paintings inspired by Willow's latest collection, Eclipse, in Willow boutiques in Paddington and at Melbourne's GPO from August until October. Call (02) 9358 4477 for inquiries.



**RENT-A-FROCK**  
Can I Borrow That is an Australian website that rents international designer dresses, from the likes of Versace and Cavalli, at a sixth of the retail price or less. Frocks can be hired for up to a month, for between \$99 and \$329. Visit [caniborrowthat.com.au](http://caniborrowthat.com.au).