

SCENT ISN'T HARMLESS BACKGROUND

A lot of people report health problems from perfume, air fresheners and scented cleaners, and most would rather do without them. Every fact below comes from published research, with its evidence grade and source.

YOU'RE NOT THE ONLY ONE

In national surveys of 4,435 adults in the US, Australia, the UK and Sweden, about 1 in 3 (32%) said fragranced products such as air fresheners, scented cleaners or other people's perfume cause them health problems.

🟡 Moderate evidence · Steinemann 2019

IT'S A WORKPLACE HEALTH PROBLEM

Over 20 years (1993–2012), California's work-related asthma surveillance confirmed 270 cases linked to perfume or air fresheners at work, 3.8% of all confirmed cases; perfume was the 9th most common workplace asthma exposure.

🟡 Moderate evidence · Weinberg 2017

THE LABEL DOESN'T TELL YOU

In a test of 6 best-selling US air fresheners and laundry products, researchers found 98 chemical detections (58 different chemicals) released into the air; none appeared on any product label, and only 1 (ethanol) appeared on a safety data sheet.

🟡 Moderate evidence · Steinemann 2009

MOST PEOPLE WOULD RATHER GO WITHOUT

About two-thirds (64.6%) of US adults did not know fragrance ingredients don't have to be listed on the label, and more than half would prefer fragrance-free workplaces (53.2% vs 19.7% against) and health care (54.8% vs 22.4%).

🟡 Moderate evidence · Steinemann 2016

AIR FRESHENERS SHUT PEOPLE OUT

41% of US adults with asthma reported health problems from air fresheners, and 36.7% said they can't use a public restroom that has one.

🟡 Moderate evidence · Steinemann 2018

IN THE US, "UNSCENTED" MEANS NOTHING

In the US, "fragrance free", "unscented" and "free and clear" have no legal definition, so each company picks its own meaning; some "unscented" products contain a masking fragrance added to hide the product's smell.

🟢 Strong evidence · Rodriguez 2024

WHAT HELPS

- Fragrance-free policies that cover cleaning products, soap and air fresheners, not just perfume.
- Removing air fresheners, plug-ins and diffusers, and ventilating instead of masking odors.
- Checking labels and product ratings: the [ihateperfume.com](https://www.ihateperfume.com) label decoder, EWG Skin Deep and EWG's Guide to Healthy Cleaning.

Evidence: 🟢 Strong 🟡 Moderate 🟠 Weak

Sources: Steinemann 2019 doi.org/10.1007/s11869-019-00699-4; Steinemann 2016 doi.org/10.1007/s11869-016-0442-z; Weinberg 2017 doi.org/10.1080/02770903.2017.1299755; Steinemann 2018 doi.org/10.1007/s11869-017-0536-2; Steinemann 2009 doi.org/10.1016/j.eiar.2008.05.002; Rodriguez 2024 doi.org/10.12788/cutis.1070