

HEALTH & FITNESS

ARE CANDLES BAD FOR YOU? HERE'S WHAT TO KNOW

Plus, non-toxic options to shop



Written by [Kaleb A. Brown](#), News Staff Writer who ties events you care about to products you need.
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It is prime candle-burning season, with scents of pumpkin, apple pie, balsam, and fir filling the air in homes. It's estimated that **7 out of 10 households** in the U.S. burn candles, with buyers increasingly turning to them for **relaxation and stress reduction**. Ironically, these household fixtures that are used to reduce stress may actually cause some increased stress due to perceived health risks. As the popularity of candles grows, there's been increased scrutiny as to their **health effects**. Where there's fire there's smoke and surely, like campfire smoke, breathing in something that combusts can't be good for you even if it smells delightful, right? We're here to take the guesswork out of the equation by clueing you in on the safety of candles and the safest products to buy for your needs.

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Are candles bad for you?



Credit: Getty Images / Irina Belova

Incense burners are another alternative to using candles.

Aside from the **fire risks** associated with burning candles, experts and research tell us that the answer for the overwhelming majority of people is no, candles are not particularly bad for you. But it's not that straightforward. Since candles combust, they cause air pollution, releasing trace amounts of hydrocarbons in the air such as toluene and benzene. The latter is a carcinogen and is linked to blood cancers such as leukemia. That may sound like cause for alarm, but the operative word here is "trace." While these compounds are present, **studies** have found that they're in such small quantities that they fail to prove much danger. That said, burning candles is associated with increased risk for individuals at risk of developing, living with, or in remission for bladder cancer.

With scent being such an important purchase factor for candle enjoyers, it's only natural to wonder if those alluring aromas are any good for you. Fortunately, there's no research that suggests scented candles are any more dangerous than their non-scented counterparts. That said, it should be noted that individuals with asthma or allergies may find themselves irritated by the scents. **Air purification** may help with this.

What type of candles are the safest?



Credit: Getty Images / miniseries

Unscented candles or scented candles are equal when it comes to whether one is safer than the other.

We've determined that candles, as a whole, aren't particularly dangerous, but there are some that are safer than others. While no specific risks have been linked to it, candles made with paraffin wax are associated with more emissions, and pulmonologist Sobia

Farooq, MD suggests avoiding candles made with it. Instead, you can opt for candles made of soy and beeswax. Dr. Farooq also suggests avoiding colored candles, as the dye often contains benzidine, which is linked to bladder cancer.

Are candles safe for pets?



Some scented candles can be too strong for animals.

Many of us have others to consider before lighting a candle. Namely, our pets. Amounts of dangerous materials that are benign to us may be more problematic for those with much smaller bodies. Not to mention, certain compounds can be toxic to animals and not humans.

When it comes to scents, the consensus is to proceed with caution, though the jury is still out on how much caution is needed. There isn't much research on the effects of certain scents and compounds on pets, meaning advice is often anecdotal.

Fortunately, candles are generally agreed to be one of the safer ways to bring some scent to a space, at least when it comes to **cats and dogs**. However, there are some things to keep in mind.

How to safely burn candles around pets

Make sure to burn your candle in a well-ventilated room that your pet doesn't have access to or can readily leave from if the smell becomes **too strong for them**. Keeping candles in high places will mitigate the risk of it being knocked over, but this won't stop a curious cat or rambunctious dog, so it's important to keep an eye on your candle. Never keep one lit when you're away or when you're asleep. This is always true, but even more so when living with pets.

Safe candle products to try

A natural candle

For a great-smelling candle that doesn't use paraffin or dyes, we recommend one of our favorite candles we've tested from **Scent Lab**. Scent Lab, as the name suggests, is all about delivering wonderful scents that are tailored to your tastes via a test that you take upon signup. What's more, the candles are undyed and are made of soy wax and cotton wicks. Plus, you can try a trial pack of your chosen scents before you commit to buying them at full price.



Scent Lab

Create your personalized smell with Scent Lab candles.

BUY NOW
at Scent Lab

A flameless candle

Flameless candles can be a great centerpiece without having to deal with any fire at all. While they provide ambiance instead of a scent, they allow users to enjoy candles in a risk-free way. If you're in the mood for blue, Furora Lighting Blue Decorative Candles are some of the best flameless candles around. Batteries are included and the ethereal candles can be set to a timer.



Furora Lighting Blue Decorative Candles

The Furora Lighting Decorative Candles come in different colors and lighting.

BUY NOW
at Amazon

Wax melts

To enjoy the scent of a candle without worrying about a flame (whether for your sake or your pet's), we recommend trying a wax melt. Wax melts heat a plate or container that you fill with scented cubes made of wax. As they melt, they release a fragrance that fills your room or home. Wax melts, as they lack a flame, are found by some to be safer than candles. Be advised that the scents of wax melts can be much stronger than candles, depending on how many wax cubes you use at a time. One of the most highly rated wax warmers on Amazon is the one by EQUSSUPRO 3D, with over 12,600 five-star reviews, with most gushing over the beautiful design.



EQUSSUPRO 3D wax burner

The EQUSSUPRO 3D wax burner come in different designs.

BUY NOW
at Amazon

Febreze

Believe it or not, despite how harsh the spray may smell, according to the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), Febreze poses **no risk to pets**. So, if you're looking to clean up a mess or spritz the air for a bit of freshener, feel free to spray away.



Febreze Odor-Fighting Air Freshener

The Febreze Odor-Fighting Air Freshener sprays a fresh, light, scent.

BUY NOW
at Amazon

For a long-lasting solution to pet odor, we recommend using Febreze's small spaces scent designed specifically to combat the smell.



Febreze Small Spaces Air Freshener

The Febreze Small Spaces Air Freshener are great for pets and eliminate odor.

BUY NOW
at Amazon

An essential oil diffuser

An essential oil diffuser is another way to bring aromatherapy into your home without having to deal with flames. **The best diffuser** we've tested is the Saje Aroma Om because it's easy to use and looks très chic.

Pet owners should note that certain essential oils are toxic to them and that there isn't much research on whether or not they're safe for them to be around even if diluted. Proceed with caution before bringing a diffuser to a home with a pet.



Saje Aroma Om

The Aroma Om scent is heat-free and has an auto shut-off feature.

BUY NOW
at Saje

Incense burners

Incense burners are another alternative to using candles, albeit not one that's particularly healthier. Similar to candles, incense burners must be ignited, meaning that it creates similar air pollution. **Research backs this up**, but it's unknown how dangerous these materials are. Even if the amount of particulate matter from incense burners is trace enough to be fine, the bottom line is that they're not much healthier than candles.

With this in mind, if you'd like to give incense burners a try, check out **one of the best incense burners**, the Spacekeeper Waterfall Incense Burner. This burner comes with 7 different scents included and burns for 15 minutes per piece, emitting a strong, lasting aroma.



SPACEKEEPER Ceramic Backflow Incense Holder and Burner Waterfall

The SPACEKEEPER Ceramic Backflow Incense Holder and Burner features a waterfall and different color wicks.

BUY NOW
at Amazon

Reed diffusers

Reed diffusers are one of the safest ways to add scent to a home, as they don't need to be burned, unlike candles and incense burners. One of the highest-rated reed diffusers on Amazon is sold by Cocod'or Store and has over 8,600 five-star reviews thanks to its lovely, light fragrance.



COCODOR Preserved Flower Reed Diffuser

The COCODOR Preserved Flower Reed Diffuser comes in 10 different scents.

BUY NOW
at Amazon

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