Are Plastics Making Us Sick?

**By Dr. Alyssa Musgrove**

Plastic products can be found all around us – they are common in our modern world. From food packaging to children’s toys, drinking cups to disposable plates, it’s hard to go a day without having some contact with this material.

Over the last several years, much attention has been given to certain chemicals in plastic, like Bisphenol A (BPA), and the potential health problems these chemicals can cause. The FDA banned the use of BPA in baby bottles and sippy cups in 2012 but maintains that low-level exposure to BPA through food containers and packaging is safe. However, there is also a growing body of research pointing to the fact that the chemicals found in plastics – even in small amounts – could be making us sick.

So, what does the research say about our exposure to these chemicals? Do we really need to reduce our exposure to plastic? And is that even possible?

**The Problem with Plastic**

BPA is added to plastics to make them more durable. It is also widely used in food packaging and has been shown to leach into the food we eat. BPA is a known hormone disrupter and mimics estrogen in the body. Its toxic effects are well-documented in third-party, peer-reviewed medical literature. According to the Center for Disease Control, 92% of people who were tested had detectable levels of BPA and other plastic chemicals in their bodies -- including newborns.

Phthalates are compounds also found in many plastic products. Phthalates were banned by the European Union in 2005, and many other countries have since followed suit (although the U.S. is not one of them). Exposure to both BPA and phthalates has been linked to a host of health issues. According to *The Journal of the Yale School of Environmental Studies*:

*“There is also now abundant research that links BPA and phthalate exposure to such human health concerns as deformities of the male and female genitals; premature puberty in females; decreased sperm quality; and increases in breast and prostate cancers, infertility, miscarriages, obesity, type 2 diabetes, allergies and neurological problems, like attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.”*

**BPA Free is Not Necessarily Better**

Given the controversy over the use of BPA, manufacturers have brought numerous “BPA free” products to market in recent years. However, instead of BPA, these manufacturers are now using Bisphenol S (BPS) and other chemicals, which recent studies are showing are just as bad – if not worse – than BPA.

In 2013, The University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston released a study that found even low-level BPS exposure – less than one part per trillion – can disrupt normal cell function and potentially lead to metabolic disorders such as diabetes, asthma, birth defects and cancer.

According to Professor Cheryl Watson, lead author of the study:

*“[Manufacturers] put ‘BPA-free’ on the label, which is true. The thing they neglected to tell you is that what they’ve substituted for BPA has not been tested for the same kinds of problems that BPA has been shown to cause. That’s a little bit sneaky.”*

In 2011, a study in the journal *Environmental Health Perspectives* examined 455 products packaged in plastic from a variety of major retailers, including Target, Wal-Mart, Trader Joe’s and Whole Foods. Researchers reported:

*“Almost all commercially available plastic products we sampled — independent of the type of resin, product, or retail source — leached chemicals having reliably detectable EA [estrogenic activity], including those advertised as BPA free. In some cases, BPA-free products released chemicals having more EA [estrogenic activity] than did BPA-containing products.”*

**What You Can Do**

While completely eliminating your exposure to BPA and similar chemicals is nearly impossible, there are ways you can limit it. Here are a few helpful guidelines:

* Switch to glass cups for drinking.
* Stop buying processed foods packaged in plastics. (This will not only limit your exposure to harmful chemicals but will have a huge impact on your overall health, as well.)
* Avoid canned foods, as the linings typically contain BPA or a BPA alternative.
* Switch to a stainless steel or a glass water bottle, instead of drinking from plastic water bottles. Use your own water bottle when ordering drinks away from home.
* Use glass and metal dishes, silverware and bakeware in place of plastic.
* Use glass containers for food storage.
* Never heat food in plastic containers.
* Use parchment paper or beeswax fabric to wrap sandwiches for packed lunches instead of baggies or plastic wrap.
* Read labels on cosmetics and personal care products. Avoid those that contain phthalates in the ingredients list.
* Skip the receipt, as most have a BPA coating.
* Choose wood or fabric toys for children instead of plastic.
* Don’t get takeout food in Styrofoam containers, which are a major source of plastic chemicals.

The way plastics are manufactured is continually changing, and there are still many unknowns. The large amount of growing research makes a strong case for limiting plastic use in your daily life. By following the steps above and making a few simple changes, you can decrease your own exposure and impact your health for the better.

*Pathways to Healing specializes in holistic chiropractic care. Dr. Alyssa Musgrove draws on a variety of techniques, including chiropractic, kinesiology, nutrition, food allergy testing and lifestyle counseling to assist clients in achieving optimal health and wellness in one setting. In addition, the practice is committed to being a valuable source of information so that people can learn how to live a healthy lifestyle and prevent future illness. Pathways to Healing is located at 1022 Founders Row, Lake Oconee Village, Greensboro. The office can be reached at 706-454-2040.*