

PLASTICS

in Our World

By Dr. Carol Ann Fischer, D.C., N.D.

Avoiding plastics is good for your health and the health of the environment. Plastic is convenient, lightweight, unbreakable and relatively inexpensive. However, there are both environmental and health risks from the widespread use of plastics. Most plastics are made from petroleum, a non-renewable and mostly imported resource. Plastic packaging also creates unnecessary waste, taking up a large volume of landfill space.

Plastics are part of the group of chemicals called “endocrine disruptors,” defined by The National Institute of Health, NIH, “any synthetic chemical that when absorbed either mimics or blocks hormones and disrupts body normal function.” These disruptors—inhaled, ingested or absorbed—can alter normal hormone levels, change hormone receptor sensitivity, cause weight gain, stimulate cancer cells, change cellular communication, alter immunity and cause structural brain damage, hyperactivity (ADD/ADHD) and early puberty.

Why are they becoming such an increasing problem? Because they are literally everywhere we are, all the time. Here’s a partial list of where these chemicals come from: plastic resins, fertilizers, pesticides, oral



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contraceptives, cookware, clothing, flame retardants, mattresses, rugs, household cleaners, soaps, cosmetics, shampoos, animal feed, petroleum byproducts, detergents, fumigants and fungicides. As reported last year in the Detroit Free Press, some of the worst chemicals are plasticizers like bisphenol A (BPA), and polyvinyl chloride (PVC). These chemicals are used to make plastic more flexible, such as with food and beverage storage containers.

We now know that these products carry health risks because the plastic leaches into the food and water. In September 2009 the Environmental Working Group released guidelines for the safe use of plastic. Extremes in temperatures, especially microwave heating and freezing water bottles, can break down the plastics and release the chemicals into the food and drink. Avoid reusing single plastics and old, scratched water bottles for the same reason. For a full listing of recommended guidelines, visit EWG.org. All plastic bottles have been required by law to have a small triangle with a number from 1 to 7 inside it, usually placed on the bottom or near the bottom of the bottle. They



were actually put there to aid in knowing what to recycle. Numbers 1 and 2 are fairly recyclable; numbers above that probably shouldn't be recycled unless your recycler says they can use them.

Plastics marked 1, 2, 4, or 5 don't contain BPA or phthalates, and are considered safer. Plastics coded 3 contain BPA, recently banned in new children's toys. Consider discarding any shower curtains, inflatable beach toys, raincoats and toys that are labeled 3 made before February 2009.

It is also advisable to avoid polycarbonate containers (sometimes marked with 7 or PC), especially for children's food and drinks. These plastics are rigid and transparent, like plastic food storage containers and water bottles. Trace amounts of BPA can migrate from these containers, particularly if used for hot food or liquids. Soft or cloudy-colored plastic does not contain BPA.

A recent study from Harvard University found that college students drinking their cold drinks from number 7 polycarbonate bottles had 93 percent more BPA in their bodies than a control group. For optimal health and safety is best to use glass for water, or stainless steel drinking bottles instead of any plastic.

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