The Bad News About BPA

Bisphenol A (BPA) is an industrial chemical that is used widely in plastics and can be found in millions of products in most American households. While the FDA has approved it and continues to deem its use as safe due to the "low levels" that may migrate from packaging into foods and beverages, there is a mounting body of evidence to support the swirl of concern that continues to surround the use of BPA. It has been linked to numerous health concerns, and unfortunately, its production and use in many commercial products doesn't seem to be slowing down very quickly. That's why it's important to know what BPA is, where to find it, and how to avoid it.

BPA Basics

BPA is a building block used to make polycarbonate plastic – plastics that are clear and tough. It is also commonly used to make an epoxy resin that is used as a liner for the inside of most canned food products. Ironically, the BPA-filled epoxy was designed to prevent contamination associated with dissolved metals that can leach into canned foods and beverages.

BPA has already been banned in the European Union, Canada, China, and Malaysia – especially in products for babies and children. While at least 11 U.S. states have banned BPA in baby bottles and sippy cups, the FDA has only banned its use in infant formula packaging thus far.

Where Does BPA Hide?

BPA can be found in many places, but the most common places it lurks are in commercially-packaged food and beverage products. Here is a comprehensive list of places you're likely to find BPA:

- Plastic containers (#7 plastic is the most common source) – bottles, tableware, food storage containers, processed food packaging
- Canned foods
- Toiletries and feminine hygiene products
- CDs and DVDs
- Household electronics
- Sports equipment
- Printer receipts (thermal)
- Dental filling sealants

Why the Worry?

BPA is used in so many products that there is increasing worry about widespread human exposure to this concerning chemical. In fact, according to a 2003-2004 National Health and Nutrition Examination Study (NHANES) conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), detectable levels of BPA were found in 93% of Americans age six years and older.

Health Risks of BPA

BPA is considered an endocrine disruptor, which means it can mimic or interfere with hormonal function, even at very low doses. Because the endocrine system includes your glands (which make hormones), BPA can affect numerous body functions including growth, metabolism, and sexual development and function. Here is just a sample of the researched effects of BPA:

Fertility

Numerous studies have found a correlation between BPA and fertility problems in both

men and women. Studies have linked higher BPA blood levels with miscarriage, lower egg and sperm production, and difficulty conceiving. One study published in the Journal of Clinical Endocrinology and Metabolism indicated that women who have polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) have significantly higher BPA levels than those without PCOS.

Fetal/Early Childhood Development

Pregnant mothers exposed to BPA have been reported to have babies with lower birth weight – up to half a pound less than those without exposure. Prenatal and early childhood exposure to BPA has been linked to asthma and wheezing in children. Babies born to mothers with higher BPA levels grew up to be more hyperactive, depressed, and anxious and demonstrated more emotional reactivity and aggressiveness. Finally, early exposure to BPA has been linked to prostate and breast tissue development that could increase the risk of cancer.

Cardiovascular Risk Factors

While the data varies greatly, studies have reported an increased risk of high blood pressure in those with high BPA levels. Other research has linked a greater risk of obesity, heart disease, diabetes, and insulin resistance to individuals with higher BPA levels.

Brain Function

In a study published in the Journal of the National Academy of Sciences, researchers found that BPA could suppress genes that support the early development of the central nervous system. The belief is that this suppression may predispose us to neurodevelopmental disorders such as ADHD, autism and/or learning disorders.

The List Goes On

Finally, countless other studies have demonstrated that BPA can have a negative effect on other areas of the body, including immune function, liver function, and thyroid function.

Avoiding BPA

While BPA is prevalent, it is possible to avoid it or at least significantly reduce your exposure to it. Here are a few ways to avoid BPA:

- **Avoid beverages in plastic bottles**. From water and seltzer to iced tea and kombucha, you'll find BPA in many plastic bottles. Your best bet is to find a quality stainless steel bottle for your favorite drink.
- **Reduce your use of processed food**. If you buy from the farmer's market, chances are there's no BPA. Avoiding foods in plastic containers or cans can significantly reduce your exposure to BPA.
- **Use glass, porcelain, or stainless steel for food/beverage storage**. Storing food and drinks in plastic containers may seem easier or less expensive, but over time, investing in alternate

food storage options can pay off. Try mason jars or even reuse containers such as those you'd buy filled with pickles or spaghetti sauce.

- **Steer clear of canned foods.** Instead of buying canned goods, switch to fresh or frozen fruits and vegetables, and choose dry beans instead of canned beans.
- **Keep plastics cool.** Since plastic is everywhere, it can be difficult to avoid them altogether. If you have food or beverages stored in plastics, keep them cool. Don't leave them in a hot car where the BPA is more likely to seep into the contents, and be sure not to put them in the dishwasher or microwave. Stay away from #7 plastic at all costs, which is the most likely source of BPA.

Sources

Bisphenol A (*National Institute of Environmental Health Studies*)

California joins 10 other states in banning BPA from infant feeding containers (*Consumer Reports*)

How BPA May Disrupt Brain Development *(Time)*

In Vivo Effects of Bisphenol A in Laboratory Rodent Studies *(Reproductive Toxicology)*

Questions & Answers on Bisphenol A (BPA) Use in Food Contact Applications *(U.S. Food & Drug Administration)*

Study: Bisphenol-A (BPA) Harms Brain Function (*Natural Blaze*)

What is BPA, and what are the concerns about BPA? (*Mayo Clinic*)

What Is BPA and Why Is It Bad for You? (*Healthline*)

Preparing & Reheating Food Without a Microwave

While a microwave may seem convenient for food preparation, it really isn't the best option when it comes to your health, especially if you're heating foods in plastic containers. Breaking the microwave habit is easier than you think – just try these alternate options for preparing and reheating your favorite foods.

Get toasty. A toaster oven is a great option for quickly wpreparing or reheating a meal. Most have toast, bake, and broil options and its small size means it heats up fast.

Broil it up. For foods that need to get crispy or melty, your oven's broiler is a great way to heat things up. Just be sure to stay close by and make it quick – the broiler is infamous for burning.

Start with the stovetop. Perfect for heating a sauce or steaming a great dish, the stovetop is a safe way to reheat a wide range of foods.

Slow cooker or Instant Pot. Whether you've got all day or you're short on time, these convenient cooking tools can help you get your food to the perfect temperature without using the microwave.