

IS PLASTIC MAKING YOU FAT AND ANXIOUS?

MIRA DESSY, NE
THE INGREDIENT GURU

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Mira Dessy

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INTRODUCTION

Plastic, it's all around us, a significant part of our modern lives. From hangers to toothbrushes, hairbrushes, storage containers, toys, and decorative accessories we live our lives surrounded by plastic.

One plastic ingredient that is still receiving lot of news coverage is Bisphenol A, also known as BPA. What exactly is BPA? It is a building block for making plastic and plastic additives. Discovered in 189, it is highly used in polycarbonate plastic items such as shatterproof bottles, CDs and DVDs, eyeglass lenses, and medical equipment. It has also infiltrated our food packaging, such as plastic lined metal containers, sippy cups, a significant amount of microwaveable cookware, and plastic bags.

A large part of the concern about BPA is that it is now known to be part of a category of endocrine interrupting chemicals called obesogens. Simply put, an obesogen gets into our body and causes harm by reprogramming stem cells to turn into fat cells, or altering gene function. A study published in 2009 in *Molecular and Cellular Endocrinology* stated,

“The recent dramatic rise in obesity rates is an alarming global health trend that consumes an ever increasing portion of health care budgets in Western countries. Recent research implicates environmental risk factors... evidence points to endocrine disrupting chemicals that Moralist interfere with the body’s adipose tissue biology, endocrine hormone systems or central hypothalamic–pituitary–adrenal axis as suspects in derailing the homeostatic mechanisms important to weight control.”

In plain English, our exposure to BPA may be one of the factors that is contributing to the growing epidemic of obesity.

Obesogens also have the ability to mimic estrogen and its effects on the body. This estrogenic effect may be linked to reproductive abnormalities, breast cancer, prostate cancer and even diabetes. Unfortunately, in spite of the knowledge of how bad BPA is for us, it still permeates our food chain.

At the end of 2010, Canada acknowledged BPA as a toxic substance for both humans and for the environment; their government is working to remove it from use.

In the United States, unfortunately, things are moving quite a bit slower in spite of studies which show that, in addition to being a hormone-disruptor, early exposure to BPA can increase the risk of developing a number of behavior problems such as anxiety, depression, conduct issues, inattentive behavior, aggression, and hyperactivity.



BPA can be found in grocery store and gas station receipts (that thermal paper is lined with BPA).

One research letter published in the Journal of the American Medical Association found that cashiers working a two-hour shift saw an increase in their urinary output of BPA. Levels jumped significantly from 1.8 mcg/l to 5.8 mcg/l. Further testing, six hours after a shift ended, shows that BPA levels could still rise over time. Wearing gloves seemed to be a good protective measure and no increase in BPA was detected after a two hour shift with gloves.

We all handle receipts from the gas station, grocery store, department stores, not at the same level of course as a cashier. Unfortunately, we are probably getting far more exposure than we realize. Now it turns out that many of those BPA-laden receipts are being recycled making it even more pervasive in our environment as it shows up in toilet paper, paper towels, newspapers, and other “post-consumer” recycled products.

Read on to learn more about BPA, where it hides, and some strategies for supporting your health amidst the sea of plastic that surrounds us.



HEALTH ISSUES LINKED TO BPA

Big Chem, Big Harm?

Manufacturers have tried very hard to prevent any legislation or limitations on the use of BPA. Now with a new study published in *Neuroendocrinology*, it turns out that pregnant women who are exposed to BPA can pass along changes in behavior and DNA to their unborn babies (in the study this was done using mice, not humans. However, the researchers stated that there was cause to believe these changes were significant enough to affect humans as well). These genetic changes continued into future generations, affecting even those who had no direct exposure to BPA.

According to the article listed above, *“The researchers found behaviors in BPA-exposed mice and their descendants that may parallel autism spectrum disorder or attention deficit disorder in humans.”*

BRAIN HEALTH



Studies have shown that BPA, an estrogen-mimicking hormone disruptor, can negatively impact a fetus' developing brain. This can affect estrogen receptors as well as oxytocin and oxytocin receptors in the amygdala and the hypothalamus. There can also be changes to the neurotransmitter system and how it handles stress. In fact one study found that *“combinations of stress and perinatal BPA may increase sensitivity to stress in adults.”*

FINE MOTOR SKILLS IN GIRLS



Phthalates are another form of plastic that appear heavily in our environment. They're used to make toys, vinyl flooring, packaging for food and personal care products, and more.

A new study from the Columbia Center for Children's Environmental Health shows that these plasticizers can have an impact on girls and their fine motor skill development. It appears that the changes happen in utero, while the fetus is vulnerable to maternal exposure.

FERTILIZATION & REPRODUCTION



Exposure to these endocrine-disrupting chemicals has been shown to also affect development and epigenetic health. In other words, it can affect our genes, causing damage to the chromosomes.

Recent studies show BPA affects reproduction and fertility for both males and females. It can also negatively affect pregnancy and may increase the risk for miscarriage.

DENTAL FILLINGS LINKED TO KIDS BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS



Another strike against BPA. More consumers are choosing to avoid using mercury amalgams due to the health risks. Instead, they choose composite fillings.

What they may not realize, however, is that the composite is in part made of BPA. Extreme exposure happens during the liquid state and once the composite is hardened, there is reported to be no further risk.

However, to ensure the least possible risk, it is important that the dentist use a layering technique where each layer is fully hardened before the next layer is added.

Obviously, it is important to take care of our teeth and to fill cavities when they occur. But another more health-supporting option is to take better care of our teeth. Reduce or avoid sugary drinks and sweets, avoid sticky sweet foods, and practice good dental hygiene.

HEART DISEASE



Comparing BPA levels in the urine of test subjects from 10 years ago and now, it appears that those with higher BPA levels were more prone to heart disease.

A recent study has yet again shown that there is a positive correlation between higher levels of BPA and coronary artery disease. Dr. David Melzer, the lead researcher on the latest study, also points out that BPA can cause liver and oxidative cell damage, has risk implications for pancreatic function, and, again, is linked with an increase in obesity.



OTHER PLASTICS

In light of all of these health issues, many companies now tout the fact that they are using BPA-free plastics in their products. It's important to know that BPA-free doesn't mean bisphenol free. Any bisphenol is a hormone-disrupting chemical. For many companies, the switch to BPF or BPS may look consumer- friendly, however, these products still present health problems.

Then there is the rise in alternative plastics. Unfortunately, studies appear to show that all petroleum-based plastics have issues with leaching estrogenic activity (EA) chemicals. This includes PES (polyethersulfone), a BPA substitute used for hard plastic bottles, PET bottles, and Tritan -- a copolyester made by the Eastman Chemical Company.

BIO-PLASTIC



Of equal concern is the rise in the use of bioplastic. This is being touted as the best replacement to traditional plastics because it is supposed to break down and be more environmentally friendly.

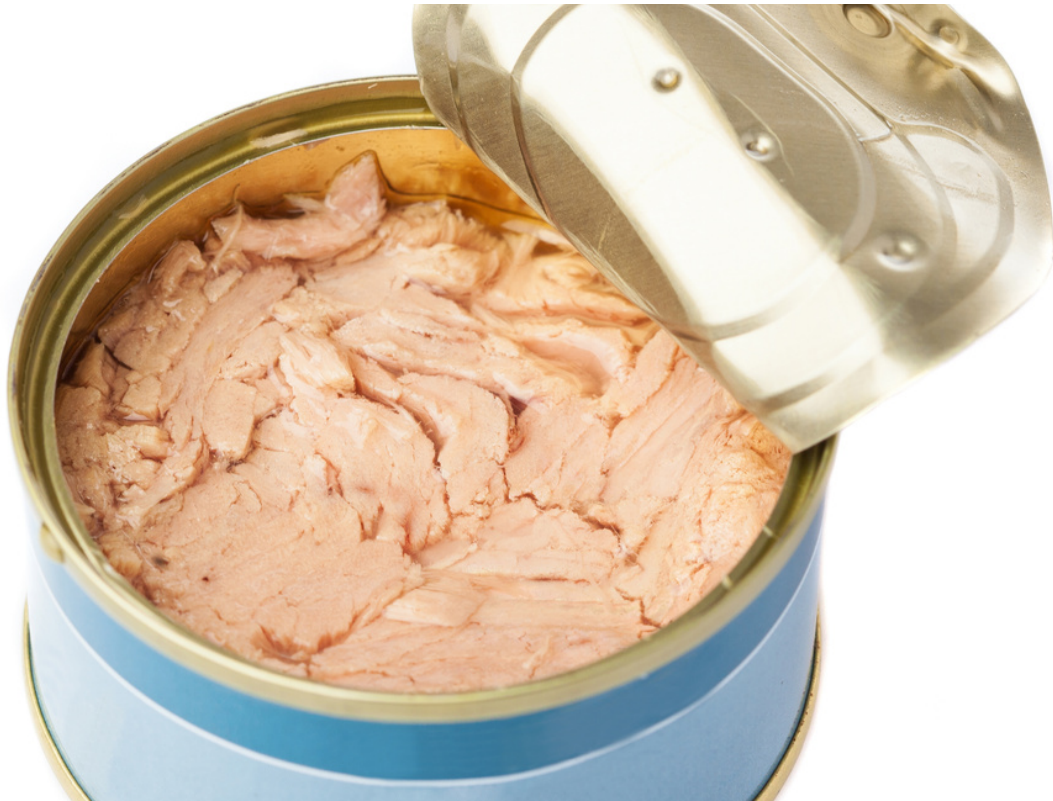
However, it turns out that many bio-plastics are made with GMO corn. For those who try to avoid genetically modified organisms, it is worrisome that this product is still finding its way into the environment.

According to information found online at the Holistic Moms Network, some bio-degradable plastics have a mystery ingredient that helps them to break down faster.

Researching this further, it appears the information regarding that chemical is “proprietary” and so according to governmental rules not need to be shared with the general public. Other information states that it may *“leave some toxic residue but the environmental impact is lessened.”*

It is important to note that even plant-based plastics (such as bio-plastic PLA) have been shown to leach EA chemicals.

DECREASING YOUR EXPOSURE



Due to the invention of canned foods in the early 1800's, our ability to store food for long periods of time has dramatically increased. If the ingredients in the can are dry or dehydrated in some way, that storage can be as long as 30 years.

There are two major types of canned goods, those you make yourself at home (such as jams, pickles, chutneys, etc), and those you purchase at the grocery store. For the purposes of this ebook, I'm primarily referring to those that you purchase.

Leaving aside the matter of a zombie apocalypse, it is prudent to have some canned goods on hand either as part of a well-managed pantry, or in case of an emergency.

While it's a great thought to prepare all of your food fresh and from scratch, in our over-scheduled American culture this can be a little difficult to achieve on a daily basis. And if the power goes out or there's a storm preventing you from getting out to the store, it's helpful to have canned goods on hand.

When buying canned goods, one of the big issues is what's in it. Canned foods are a big health hazard as most canned foods are lined with a resin containing BPA. There are a few brands that claim to be BPA-free but unfortunately, an article from Consumer Reports, December 2009, showed that some companies which claimed to have BPA free cans still had trace amounts of the chemical in their product. The report went on to state that those foods in plastic containers with metal pull-off lids, specifically Chef Boyardee Beef Ravioli in Tomato and Meat Sauce, had BPA levels that were 1.5 times higher than the same product in a metal can.

BPA-FREE MANUFACTURERS



The following list shows which producers are using BPA-free cans. Keep in mind that BPA-free linings tend to be more expensive and so their products may cost more. Your health, and the health of your loved ones, is worth it.

- Ace of Diamonds
- American Tuna
- Amy's
- Annie's Homegrown
- Beach Cliff
- Bearitos
- Bionature
- Earth's Best Organic
- EarthPure
- Farmer's Market
- Genova

- Gluten Free Café
- Health Valley
- Health Valley Organic
- Imagine
- Juanita's
- Jyoti Natural Foods
- King Oscar
- Lucini Italia
- Muir Glen
- Native Forest
- Natural Sea
- Pillar Rock
- Port Clyde
- Raincoast Trading
- Read
- Seneca
- Sprouts Farmers Market
- Tyson
- Walnut Acres
- Westbrae Natural

Side note: In the United States, 1 in 6 people don't have enough to eat. Approximately 14 million of them are children. If you're cleaning out your pantry and shifting to foods which are free of chemicals and BPA, you may want to donate them to the Food Pantry. If your budget has a little room to spare, consider buying a little extra and donating it. As much as I teach and promote eating as clean as possible, I also believe that eating is better than not eating. It's a good-better-best philosophy.

SLIPS



Something else to keep a lookout for which may be coming soon to a canned product near you is SLIPS. This stand for Slippery Liquid Infused Porous Surface. It's a product which has been invented to get the container absolutely squeaky clean. It looks like this product is going to be made from a chemical analog of plant matter and infused into a teflon substrate.

Currently, it's being investigated for commercial applications such as repelling liquids, de-icing, and anti-corrosion. There are signs that it's potentially being considered for consumer-based applications as well. This means it could then be used to coat or line the inside of your jars and bottles.

As far as I can tell, it looks like the use of this material would not need to be disclosed on food labeling because it would be part of the packaging, not part of the product. If you find a ketchup container (or any other jar) that comes absolutely clean with no sticky bits and no scraping that's a pretty clear indicator that it will have this potentially Teflon-infused material on the inside of the lining.

NUMBER 7 PLASTICS



In addition to canned foods, plastics that are marked with a number 7 recycling code and any unmarked plastic containers are highly likely to be made with BPA.

CANNING



Even products in glass jars may contain BPA in the lid. Those who process their own food at home thinking that they are avoiding exposure may not be aware that Jarden Home Brands, the manufacturer of Ball, Kerr, Golden Harvest, and Bernardin brands, admits that there is some BPA in their lids.

Although there is only a small amount present in the lid material, BPA is most highly released under heat and pressure, both conditions which are met during the canning process. If you are planning on doing home canning, you can purchase reasonably priced, reusable, BPA-free canning lids. These are typically listed as a plastic which is “An FDA and USDA approved, food grade product known as Polyoxymethylene Copolymer (POM) or Acetal Copolymer.” As mentioned above, however, all plastic appear to leach some amount of EA chemicals.

This is one of those situations where you cannot avoid exposure 100%. You can, at least, reduce your exposure and support your health with good, nourishing food choices.

TETRA PAK CARTONS



At the grocery store, soups and other products are now available in tetra pak cartons. These cartons are made from cardboard, lined with aluminum, and Low Density Polyethylene (LDPE) plastic which is considered a low risk contaminant although, as discussed, there is still a potential for EA chemical activity.

Unfortunately, tetra paks are also not very environmentally friendly since they are difficult to recycle. Currently in the US, less than 20% of all tetra pak containers are recycled. When they are recycled, they are turned into toilet paper.



DETOX - THE FOOD WAY

After reading all of this startling information about BPA and plastics in general, you may be wondering what you can do to support your body and your health. Start by looking at where plastics appear in your life and if there are ways that you can substitute other nonplastic items. Especially when it comes to those items which have direct contact with food.

Next, make a change for health by cleaning up the chemicals in your diet, eating whole foods, and the use of alkalizing beverages and foods.

It is possible to eat well and supporting your body and good health while adding detoxifying foods. This top ten list provides suggestions that are easy to add to your nutritional plan:

1. **Cilantro** – an excellent and tasty way to cleanse the body, ridding it of heavy metal accumulation. Make a cilantro pesto and add it to summer salads, add it to a stir fry, or garnish your meal with it.

2. **Cruciferous vegetables** – broccoli, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, kale, bok choy, cabbage, rutabaga, turnip, and radishes all support the liver which is important for detoxification.

3. **Fiber** – supports a healthy digestive system which in turns helps with elimination when transporting toxins out of the body. Good fiber choices include beans, fresh ground flax seeds, and whole grains.

4. **Folate** – found in dark leafy greens, calves liver, lentils, beans and asparagus. Studies appear to show that eating more folate (found in dark leafy green vegetables such as spinach) can be protective against the effects of BPA.

Note: While soy is high in folate since most soy in this country is genetically modified it is not the healthiest option.

5. **Garlic** – high in sulfur garlic, helps dilate the blood vessels so they don't get blocked. It's also anti-inflammatory, anti-viral and anti-bacterial. It goes without saying that you want either a ceramic or metal garlic press.

6. **Green tea** – high in anti-oxidants, supports the liver and helps with hydration.

7. **Lemons** – have an alkalizing effect on the system. Also, add their juice to foods rich in iron to increase bio-availability.

8. **Wheatgrass** – an excellent detoxifier that is also high in vitamins, minerals, and amino acids.

9. **Selenium** – helps to rid the body of mercury while protecting against freeradicals. Found in codfish, tuna, egg yolks, beef, shitake mushrooms, lamb, and Brazil nuts.

10. **Water** – pure, clean water helps flush toxins from the body. It also supports our kidney and liver detoxify more efficiently.

Important tip: Another way to avoid plastic is to check your chewing gum ingredients. Most brands contain “gum base,” a code name for polyethylene which is also used to make plastic bags and bottles.



REPACKAGING ITEMS

The sad truth is that you can't avoid exposure to plastics and BPA. It's too pervasive in our environment. You can, however be aware of where it can be found and make positive changes. Choosing nourishing foods and beverage to support your health and staying informed is the best, most important thing that you can do to protect yourself.

Avoiding plastic as much as possible in your environment is also a good idea. Here are some easy tips to help reduce the amount of plastic in your home:

- Use glass bottles and jars to drink out of when you're on the road. My favorite idea for this is to reuse 16 ounce kombucha bottles.
- Switch to glass or metal drinking straws instead of using plastic. Bring them with you when you are on the road. American's use over 500 million straws every day, this helps to cut down on that environmental pollution.
- Use glass containers to store food. This is a great way to purpose glass jars from products you've bought at the grocery stores. Many of them can be used for the refrigerator, the freezer, or for dry goods in the pantry. Canning jars can also be useful for this.
- Bring your own container with you when you go out to eat. The bonus is you'll also create less trash that way.
- Use non-plastic alternatives to plastic wrap such as cloth wraps, bees wraps, and parchment paper.
- Don't microwave food in plastic containers or use a plastic cover in the microwave oven.
- When purchasing lunch-meats re-wrap them in unlined butcher paper



BONUS CHAPTER

Edible Packaging

Understanding what's in our food is an important part of making healthy choices. Equally important is understanding what's on your food. Those things, the chemicals and packaging, which touch and migrate into your food. There are over 4,000 Food Contact Materials (FCM) currently in use today. As manufacturers and food producers continue to investigate new ways to package our food, this number continues to grow.

The following is an excerpt from *The Pantry Principle: how to read the label and understand what's really in your food*, Versadia Press, 2017.

“Edible” Packaging

The newest packaging concept, still in development, encases a food in an edible skin. The bite-sized balls can hold a variety of otherwise-uncontainable foods, like yogurt, ice cream, and even juice and cocktails. Just rinse the ball as you would an apple or a carrot, and pop it in your mouth like a grape. The inventor claims the casing is biodegradable, with the raw ingredients coming from raspberries and algae. Of course algae tends to have free glutamic acid making a source of MSG. We also don't yet know what other ingredients make up the casing, so you don't necessarily want to eat them. These food balls are tentatively slated to appear in the US as early as 2013. You can be sure it will be accompanied by marketing spin. Be cautious of the hype; remember that biodegradable does not mean chemical-free. [Shapiro. 2012]

Recently edible packaging has begun to appear in marketing efforts and at the grocery store. This packaging is made of either edible films (created separately and then put onto the item) or edible coatings (applied directly).

Given the benefit of longer shelf life for perishable goods, this segment of the FCM market is expected to grow to over 1 billion dollars by 2023 and more than 6 billion by the end of 2026.

Edible packaging tends to be seen favorably by consumers because it is perceived to be:

- more hygienic
- less wasteful
- more environmentally friendly

One of the first companies to use edible packaging is Stonyfield Yogurt. They've created a product called Frozen Yogurt Pearls. Stonyfield chose to use a different list of ingredients for their frozen yogurt pearls.

Below is the ad they created to promote their product:



Sounds delicious, doesn't it? But let's take a closer look.

ORGANIC STRAWBERRY SKIN

ORGANIC STRAWBERRY PUREE, WATER, ORGANIC SUGAR, ORGANIC RICE SYRUP SOLIDS, ORGANIC WHITE CHOCOLATE (ORGANIC SUGAR, ORGANIC COCOA BUTTER, ORGANIC MILK POWDER, SOY LECITHIN, ORGANIC NATURAL VANILLA FLAVOR), ORGANIC INVERT CANE SUGAR, SODIUM ALGINATE, SODIUM CITRATE, ORGANIC BEET POWDER FOR COLOR, ORGANIC ACACIA GUM, ORGANIC CAROB BEAN GUM, NATURAL STRAWBERRY FLAVOR, ORGANIC TARA GUM.

While it is encouraging to see that the ingredients used are, for the most part, organic, whole food sources, there are a few concerns. One is the amount of sodium used, the use of several different kinds of sugar, and the “natural” flavors which can be sourced from a number of different things.

Additionally, Stonyfield is using 17 different ingredients just to make this edible package. Compare the edible coating ingredients with the actual contents of the frozen yogurt pearl:

ORGANIC CHOCOLATE FROZEN NONFAT YOGURT
CULTURED PASTEURIZED ORGANIC NONFAT MILK, ORGANIC SUGAR, ORGANIC COCOA, ORGANIC RICE SYRUP, ORGANIC WHEY PROTEIN CONCENTRATE, ORGANIC CAROB BEAN GUM, ORGANIC GUAR GUM, ORGANIC NATURAL VANILLA FLAVOR. CONTAINS LIVE ACTIVE CULTURES: S. THERMOPHILUS, L. BULGARICUS, L. ACIDOPHILUS, BIFIDUS, AND L. CASEI.

Nine ingredients. Thirteen if you include each live active culture as a separate ingredient. And the actual product also uses “natural” flavoring. This ingredient is not necessarily a bad thing however because so many different additives can hide under that “natural” label it's always something to be cautious about.

Now the recap: Stonyfield wants to sell a frozen yogurt pearl in an edible package. The edible packaging contains more ingredients than the contents. Even more puzzling is the realization that because having a sanitary package around an edible package defeats the purpose of the edible packaging in the first place. It's important to remember that food producers spend significant amounts of money trying to steer you, and your food dollars, toward products that they have created. They research heavily to figure out what you want (whether it's edible packaging, gluten free products, high protein food choices, etc) and then create a marketing and production stream to supply it.

As a consumer it's important to think about your choices. Don't be fooled by their manipulation.

RESOURCES

There's so much plastic in our environment that we often don't even see it. It's become part of the background. Here are a few options to help you replace everyday items with non-plastic alternatives:

- Glass Straws – made by Strawsome these are durable and great for home, office, or on the road
- Glass Microwave Oven Plate Cover – this is the one I use in my home when I need to avoid splatters in the microwave oven
- Biodegradable Bamboo Toothbrush – environmentally friendly and no plastic exposure from your toothbrush

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Mira Dessy is The Ingredient Guru. A holistic nutrition professional, author, and a popular public speaker, she knows that it's not just what you eat, but what's in what you eat. Dessy is a Board Certified Holistic Health Practitioner whose mission is to educate and empower consumers.

She is a member of the National Association of Nutrition Professionals, the Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior, and the American Association of Drugless Practitioners. She is the Chief Health Officer of 3rd Rock Essentials, is on the Board of Directors for the American Holistic Health Association, is a member of the Professional Advisory Board for the Turner Syndrome Society of the United States, and is a founding member of the Holistic Business and Wellness Alliance.

She can be found online at www.theingredientguru.com

More books by this author:

- [The Pantry Principle: How to Read the Label and Understand What's Really in Your Food](#)
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