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Program on
Breast Cancer and Environmental Risk Factors

SPRECHER
INSTITUTE
for Comparative
Cancer Research

Chemicals and the Risk of Breast Cancer

Frequently Asked Questions

■ Question

Does plastic leach estrogenic chemicals?

■ Answer

Plastics May Leach Chemicals

Whether substances found in plastic can leach out into food or into the air of our homes is an active area of research. Studies have looked at chemicals called "plasticizers." Plasticizers are used in some plastics and other products. They help make the plastic more flexible but they do not become part of the plastic. Under the right conditions, plasticizers may leach out of the plastic.

Plasticizers Can Be Environmental Estrogens

The plasticizers called nonylphenol and bisphenol A are both weak environmental estrogens. Bisphenol A is used in

- the lining of some tin cans
- dental sealants
- baby bottles and pacifiers

Nonylphenol is used in many applications, including

- some laundry detergents
- some paints
- cosmetics
- as a non-pesticide ingredient in many commercial pesticide formulations.

How to Reduce Exposure

To what extent we are exposed to estrogenic plasticizers is a good question. Currently, we don't have adequate studies that can give us an answer, but the best approach is to minimize exposure. Some studies have shown that some plasticizers can leach out of the plastic with heat. This is why you should not microwave baby bottles. For other foods, it's best to microwave in glass, or lead free china or ceramic containers. Paper towels, napkins, or paper or china plates can be put over food containers to prevent splattering during microwaving.

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