

Are you eating what you think you are?

Over 50 years ago, a renowned study showed pesticides in human breast milk – at over ten times the current EU Maximum Residue Level for food. Today, with ever more chemicals in our environment we need to take precautionary measures

Toxins and pesticides simply cannot be avoided in today's environment. A government survey in 2004 showed pesticide residues of 67% in bread samples, 85% in farmed fish, 85% in oats and rye, 76% in pears and 40% in pre-packed salad.

Fortunately just as we have started to recognise the climatic damage we are creating in the environment we are also starting to recognise the need for pure, natural foods instead of a chemical soup.

So, what is out there?

The main concern for food is artificial pesticides used in farming. Even the humble Cox's apple, as grown here in Kent, may be sprayed as much as 16 times with up to 36 different chemicals.

Residues of herbicides, fungicides and insecticides are all present in fruit, vegetables and meat. Some of the worst offenders are: peaches, apples, peppers, celery, strawberries, spinach and mushrooms. Some of the best are: onions, avocado, pineapple, asparagus and broccoli. Even milk is not free from toxins either; residues of Lindane (connected to an increase risk in breast cancer) have been found in non-organic milk. So best of all eat organic foods, because organic farming restricts the use of artificial chemical fertilisers and pesticides to (as a last resort) just seven of the 350 pesticides available to farmers.

Food is also polluted by industry waste with PCB's and poisonous heavy metals ending up in ocean fish like tuna. Industry is also a culprit environmentally, exposing us to oestrogen mimicking phthalates in fragrances and plastic that disrupt hormones and may harm human reproduction.

There are natural toxins too. Mould and other fungal toxins are found in peanuts, wheat and corn. As many as one in three people may be allergic to mould spores.

Other toxins can come from cooking. Acrylamide is formed when carbohydrates are cooked at high temperatures such as frying, roasting and baking, e.g. in chips, crisps, breakfast cereals, biscuits, toast, pies, cakes and pizza. A large order of fries has 300 times more acrylamide than the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency allows in a glass of water! Acrylamide is carcinogenic and can cause neurological damage.

What's the effect of all these chemicals?

Most food does meet guidelines. But how safe is safe? Is any artificial presence in food really acceptable?

No one knows the long-term impact or the cocktail effect of combinations of chemicals found in food or in cleaners, fragrances, cosmetics etc. According to the US Environmental Protection Agency, 60 percent of herbicides, 90 percent of fungicides and 30 percent of insecticides are known to be carcinogenic and can

cause: birth defects, nerve damage, and block the absorption of nutrients necessary for normal healthy growth in children.

One wonders why fertility rates are falling and cancer rates are climbing! Not only are we poisoning our planet, we are also poisoning ourselves !

So what could you do about all this?

It is not all doom and gloom. By making a few basic changes, you can reduce your exposure to toxic chemicals both internally and externally:

1. Eat organic, free-range or additive food whenever possible.
2. Avoid processed foods – unless organic, as these do not contain chemical additives.
3. Always wash fruit and vegetables before cooking/eating.
4. Avoid artificial food additives, sweeteners, flavourings and colourings.
5. Avoid eating too many chips, crisps, biscuits and other foods containing acrylamide.
6. Limit tuna, marlin and swordfish and mackerel to once per week as these are all high in mercury which is very toxic to the body. If you are concerned about not having enough of the Omega 3 fatty acids which are found in oily fish, you can give these a boost by taking a pure, PCP and dioxin-free Omega 3 supplement.
7. Minimise your exposure - avoid plastic packaging and wraps, limit medicinal drugs to the essential, use natural household, toiletry and gardening products.
8. Flush your system out - drink at least 1.5 litres of water daily. Use a plumbed-in water filter to cut down heavy metals such as chlorine, copper, mercury and lead.
9. Protect your body by taking daily, a good quality broad spectrum antioxidant supplement and 1000mg of vitamin C.

Just a few changes can make all the difference! Making sensible decisions about what we put inside our bodies or expose ourselves to at home can help minimise the impact of undesirable chemicals, to help ensure we stay as well as we can long into old age.

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