

Medical studies say what chemicals in food containers harm human reproduction



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Medical studies have identified several endocrine-disrupting chemicals (EDCs) that can leach from food containers and packaging, interfering with hormonal systems and causing reproductive harm. Key classes of chemicals include bisphenols, phthalates, and per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS). [↗](#)

Bisphenols (BPA and alternatives)

Bisphenols are used to make hard, clear plastics like polycarbonate and are found in the epoxy resin linings of metal food and beverage cans. [↗](#)

Health effects:

- **BPA:** A known endocrine disruptor, bisphenol A (BPA) can mimic estrogen and has been linked to reproductive issues in both men and women.
 - **In females:** Studies have associated BPA with lower egg quality, irregular menstrual cycles, and an increased risk of disorders like polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) and endometriosis. Prenatal exposure is also linked to impaired ovarian development.
 - **In males:** BPA exposure has been linked to reduced sperm count and quality, lower testosterone levels, and issues with sexual function.
- **Alternatives (BPS and BPF):** "BPA-free" products often use alternatives like bisphenol S (BPS) and bisphenol F (BPF). Studies show these substitutes can have similar hormone-disrupting effects, impacting reproductive health in similar ways to BPA. [↗](#)

Phthalates

These chemicals are used as plasticizers to make plastics like polyvinyl chloride (PVC) more flexible and are found in some food wraps, containers, and adhesives. [↗](#)

Health effects:

- **General:** Phthalates are anti-androgens that can interfere with testosterone production and activity.

- **In males:** Phthalate exposure has been linked to altered male reproductive development, including undescended testes and genital malformations in baby boys. In adults, exposure is associated with lower testosterone levels, reduced sperm counts, and lower sperm motility.
- **In females:** Phthalates have been linked to earlier onset of puberty and may disrupt ovarian function. [🔗](#)

Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS)

Known as "forever chemicals," PFAS are used to make food packaging grease-resistant. They are found in items such as fast-food wrappers, microwave popcorn bags, and pizza boxes. [🔗](#)

Health effects:

- **Reproductive problems:** Exposure to certain PFAS compounds has been linked to reduced fertility in women, reduced fetal growth, and altered thyroid hormone levels. [🔗](#)

How to minimize your exposure

To reduce your risk of reproductive harm from these chemicals, follow these recommendations from various health studies: [🔗](#)

- **Use alternatives to plastic.** Store and heat food in containers made of glass, ceramic, or stainless steel instead of plastic.
- **Avoid heating food in plastic.** Microwaving or heating food in plastic containers can increase the leaching of chemicals into your food.
- **Check recycling codes.** Plastics with recycling codes 3 (PVC) and 7 (often polycarbonate) are more likely to contain harmful chemicals. Some alternatives used in BPA-free products also carry health risks.
- **Reduce canned and processed foods.** Opt for fresh or frozen foods instead of canned goods, as can linings can contain bisphenols.
- **Avoid grease-resistant paper.** Limit your use of fast food packaging, pizza boxes, and microwave popcorn bags that may be treated with PFAS. [🔗](#)

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Food Packaging Forum

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Jan 16, 2024 — The study found that **bisphenol A (BPA, 80-05-7)** and **phthalates** are widespread in processed and packaged foods, even those labeled as organic.



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 Tennessee Reproductive Medicine
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