

## HEALTH

# Hundreds of chemicals linked to breast cancer found in food packaging, alarming new study reveals

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Published Sep. 24, 2024, 2:47 p.m. ET

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A [shocking new study](#) found that nearly 200 chemicals linked to breast cancer are being used in food packaging, and, worse yet, dozens of the carcinogens can find their way into the body.

"There is strong evidence that 76 known or potential breast carcinogens from food contact materials recently purchased all over the world can be found in people," Jane Muncke, co-author of the study and managing director and chief scientific officer of the Food Packaging Forum, a nonprofit foundation based in Zurich, Switzerland, [told CNN this week](#).



The study found that the majority of carcinogen exposure was linked to plastics used in food packaging, though 89 suspected carcinogens were found in paper and cardboard containers.

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This revelation comes amid a sharp rise in cancer diagnoses among young people. A January study led by researchers at Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis found that breast cancer diagnoses have increased steadily in women under 50 over the last two decades.

Muncke maintained: "Getting rid of these known or suspected carcinogens in our food supply is a huge opportunity for cancer prevention."

Silent Spring Institute — a scientific research organization focused on the link between chemicals, women's health and breast cancer — published a list in 2007 of more than 200 chemicals that can cause breast tumors in animals.

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A list update [earlier this year](#) identified 921 possible carcinogens, including 642 chemicals believed to stimulate estrogen or progesterone production, [known risk factors](#) for breast cancer.

"The fact that so many potential breast carcinogens are present in food packaging and can migrate into our food is just one example of how many chemicals we are unwittingly exposed to every day," Jenny Kay, a research scientist at Silent Spring who co-authored the 2024 update, told CNN.

Published Monday in the journal *Frontiers in Toxicology*, this latest study compares the Silent Spring database of known carcinogens for breast cancer to the Database on Food Contact Chemicals Monitored in Humans.



Some of the chemicals identified in the study are PFAS, or perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances.

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Created by the Food Packaging Forum, [FCChumon](#) is a list of food contact chemicals that have been detected in human breast milk, blood, urine and other tissues.

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"The new study took our list of potential breast carcinogens and compared it to their list of chemicals that have been found in food contact materials to find out which of potential breast carcinogens could be getting into people's diets," Kay told CNN. "That's a great way to prioritize chemicals for regulatory action."

While the study found that the majority of carcinogen exposure was linked to plastics used in food packaging, 89 suspected carcinogens were found in paper and cardboard containers.

"Paper has additives such as emulsifiers and adhesives, say if papers are glued together, or there's a plastic layer glued to the paper," Muncke said.



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FCChumon is a list of food contact chemicals that have been detected in human breast milk, blood, urine and tissues.

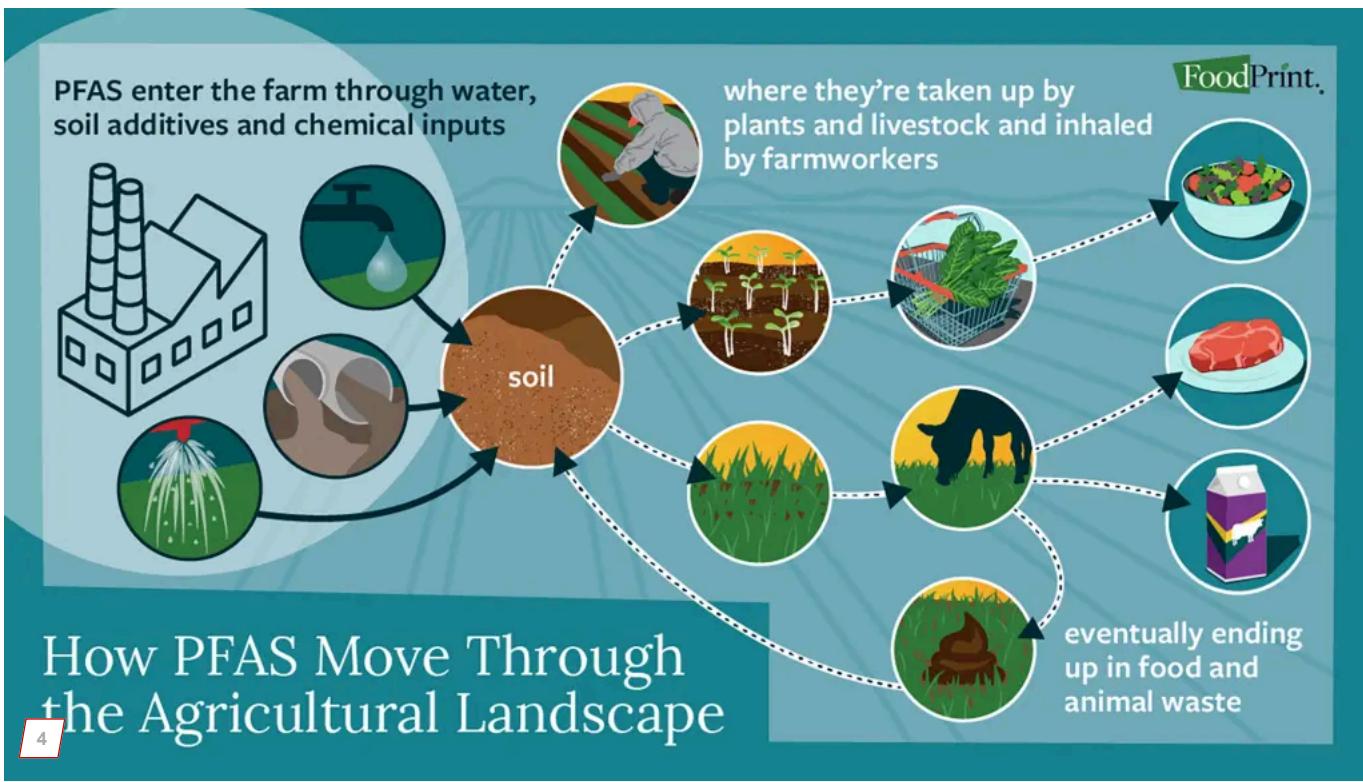
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Some of the chemicals identified in the study are **PFAS**, or perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances.

**PFAS** are a group of synthetic chemicals widely used in packaging, clothing, carpets, firefighting foam and even **toilet paper** since the 1950s. Because of the strong molecular bonds found in PFAS, they don't break down easily, and levels of PFAS build up over time in humans, animals and the environment, earning them the name "forever chemicals."

PFAS are used in food packaging to prevent liquids from soaking through wrappers and are also found in the ink used on food containers.

Research into the health risks of PFAS is ongoing. Still, studies conducted to date reveal possible health effects, including altered metabolism and fertility, reduced fetal growth, increased risk of being overweight or obese, increased cancer risk and weakened immune systems.



"Forever chemicals" got their name because of their nearly indestructible nature. The microscopic, man-made compounds are formally known as PFAS.

FoodPrint

"Packaging exists to protect and keep food safe for consumption," Sarah Gallo, senior vice president of product policy and federal affairs at the Consumer Brands Association, which represents the consumer products industry, told CNN.

"The FDA reviews and approves food contact substances through their science and risk-based system before they go to market," she continued. "The agency's post-market review also provides continuous safety analysis and regulation of the approved substances."

The Food and Drug Administration will hold a [public meeting](#) on Wednesday to present solutions for improving its post-market food analyses.

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In the meantime, [Silent Spring said consumers can mitigate their risk](#) of toxic exposure by:

- Removing the fat and skin from meat and fish before cooking to avoid pollutants that can build up in fat, and draining fat that accumulates while cooking
- Choosing smaller, younger seafood over larger, older seafood and avoiding canned food or moist food packaged in plastic or lined cardboard
- Selecting organic produce, meat and dairy when possible
- Avoiding [burning or charring](#) meat
- Microwaving and storing foods in glass rather than plastic
- Switching to a glass or stainless steel French press or drip coffee maker
- Phasing out nonstick pans from your kitchen
- Using glass or stainless steel water bottles instead of plastic
- Not drinking out of a water cooler supplied by plastic jugs
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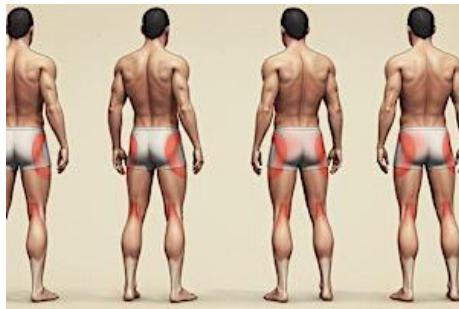
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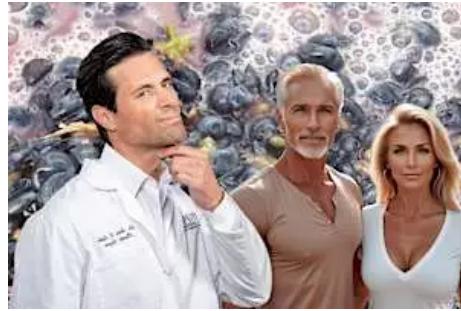
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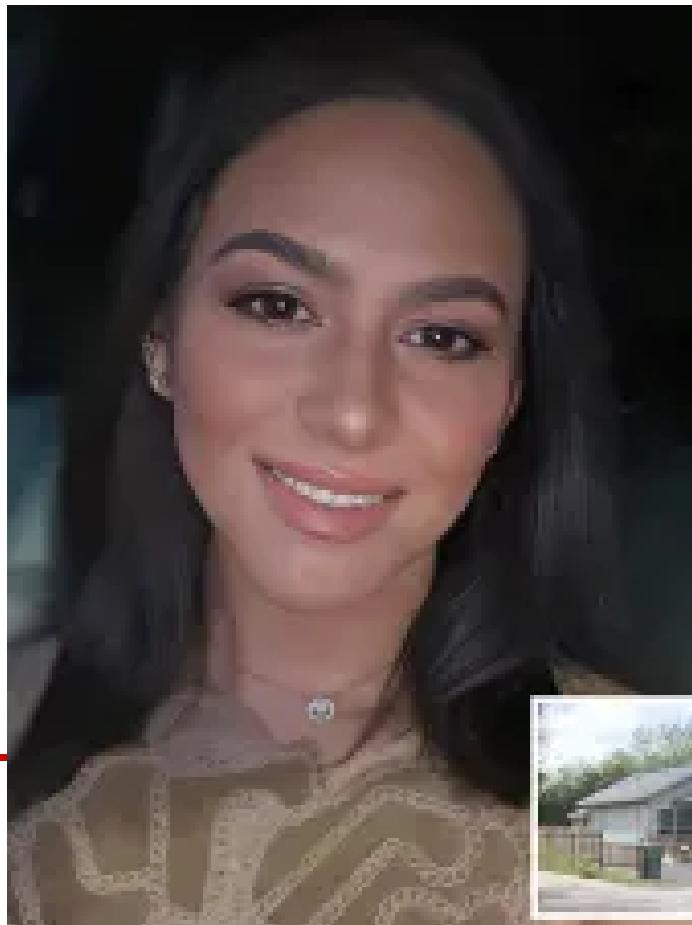
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