

Healthy Kitchens for Safer Child Care

What to avoid, what you can do



We can pay attention to the food we eat: where it comes from, what it contains, and whether it is organic. Often we do not think about the household items that come into contact with our food. Products that we use every day can contain chemicals of concern that are not listed on the label like food ingredients are! **Containers for food packaging or preparation may contain harmful chemicals that can interact with our food or drink under certain conditions.** The good news is that there are simple steps that you can take to reduce exposure to these chemicals.

What to Avoid:

Bisphenol A (BPA): BPA, the building block of polycarbonate (PC) plastic, can harm hormone systems. BPA leaches from polycarbonate, especially when heated, scratched, or exposed to acidic food. Even low levels of BPA can lead to prostate and breast cancer, reproductive problems, diabetes, and obesity. **In New York, it is illegal to sell baby bottles or sippy cups made with BPA.**

✓ **Spot it:** In the lining of most canned food products and soda cans, plastic blender jars, food processor bowls, and 'shatterproof' plastic cups and pitchers. Look for #7 or PC in the recycling logo. Restaurant supply stores sell many items made of BPA.



Perfluorocarbons (PFCs): PFCs are used to make non-stick materials, including pans and bakeware. Two common PFCs, PFOA and PFOS, may cause cancer and liver or kidney damage. PFCs do not break down easily and build up over time.

✓ **Spot 'em:** Frying pans, bakeware, cookie sheets or any other cookware advertising as non-stick or having a Teflon® coating. Packaging is usually labeled, but there is no easy way to identify PFCs once the packaging has been removed.

Lead: Even small amounts of lead exposure can lower IQ, reduce learning abilities, and cause behavior problems. Older homes may contain lead water pipes, and builders commonly used leaded solder until the 1980s. Brass fittings for water pipes may contain 8% lead.

✓ **Spot it:** Pipes or solder (used at joints) may be dull gray and appear shiny when scratched. **The only way to know for sure is to have your water tested.**



Polyvinylchloride (PVC) or Vinyl: PVC is commonly a soft, flexible plastic, often with a distinct 'plastic' odor. Chemicals in PVC such as lead and phthalates can pollute our environment and bodies. Phthalates can act like hormones, leading to a variety of reproductive problems, especially in baby boys.

✓ **Spot 'em:** Some plastic wrap and food film, and clear plastic containers.



What Does #7 Mean?

It is common for labels to indicate that products do not contain BPA or other specific chemicals. But that doesn't tell us what kind of plastic it **IS**, just what it is not.



This still leaves us in the dark. Especially because #7 is the catch-all "other" category in plastics recycling. Polycarbonate (made of BPA) is #7, but so is polylactic acid (PLA), a plastic made from plants.



Bottom line: #7 doesn't mean BPA-free, nor does it mean 'bad' plastic. Look carefully to see if there are additional letters like PC or PLA.

If you don't know, don't buy it.

What Can I Do?

- **Look for BPA-free canned food**, or avoid cans by using fresh, dried or frozen foods.
- **Avoid plastic tableware, including melamine.** Children can learn to use regular dishes. Try ceramic, or stainless steel plates, use glass or stainless steel cups when possible (and safe), and replace styrofoam or plastic with compostable dishes and flatware.
- **Never microwave plastic**, even if it is labeled "microwave safe."
- **Do not shop at restaurant supply stores.** Many items sold in them are made of polycarbonate.
- **Refrigerate leftovers** in glass containers, especially acidic foods like tomatoes.
- If you use plastic wrap, **look for PVC-free.**
- **Choose** stainless steel, cast iron, anodized aluminum nonstick, glass or ceramic pans.
- **Do not preheat nonstick pans.**
- **Flush your pipes by running the water before drinking** or mixing baby formula if the faucet is unused for six hours or more.
- **Use only cold water** for cooking, formula and drinking to reduce lead exposure.
- If you suspect your water may contain lead, **call the Safe Drinking Water Hotline, 1-800-426-4791**, for local EPA-accredited testing labs.

Chemicals and Food

Curious about pesticides on fruits and vegetables or mercury in fish? Use the links below to learn more:

www.ewg.org/foodnews/

www.nrdc.org/oceans/seafoodguide

www.montereybayaquarium.org/cr/seafoodwatch.aspx

water.epa.gov/scitech/swguidance/fishshellfish/fishadvisories/index.cfm



For More Information:

- **PFCs:** www.saferchemicals.org/resources/chemicals/pfc.html
- **Guides for BPA-free products:** guide.thesoftlanding.com/safer-product-shopping-guides/
- **PVC-Free Guide for Your Home:** www.chej.org/wp-content/uploads/Documents/PVC/PVC-Guide-1.pdf
- **EPA Lead Education:** www.epa.gov/lead/pubs/leadpdf.pdf

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