

Study: Plastic wrappers seeping into food products

By Susan Freinkel, Washington Post

In a study published last year in the journal *Environmental Health Perspectives*, researchers put five San Francisco families on a three-day diet of food that hadn't been in contact with plastic. When they compared urine samples before and after the diet, the scientists were stunned to see what a difference a few days could make: The participants' levels of bisphenol A (BPA), which is used to harden polycarbonate plastic, plunged – by two-thirds, on average – while those of the phthalate DEHP, which imparts flexibility to plastics, dropped by more than half.

The findings seemed to confirm what many experts suspected: Plastic food packaging is a major source of these potentially harmful chemicals, which most Americans harbor in their bodies. Other studies have shown phthalates (pronounced THAL-ates) passing into food from processing equipment and food-prep gloves, gaskets and seals on non-plastic containers, inks used on labels – which can permeate packaging – and even the plastic film used in agriculture.

The government has long known that tiny amounts of chemicals used to make plastics can sometimes migrate into food. The Food and Drug Administration regulates these migrants as “indirect food additives” and has approved more than 3,000 such chemicals for use in food-contact applications since 1958. It judges safety based on models that estimate how much of a given substance might end up on someone's dinner plate. If the concentration is low enough (and when these substances occur in food, it is almost always in trace amounts), further safety testing isn't required.

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