Food and Beverage Containers Are Important to Your Health- Protecting You and Your Family From BPA

By Laura Jimenez, M.S.W.

There's a lot to know to keep healthy. While the contents you consume within a food or beverage container are very important, the actual container itself used for preparing, heating, storing, and cleaning is also very important as well. You may already know some of this information, but most people don't know the half of it. Following are the facts concerning BPA:

BPA stands for bisphenol-A which is a synthetic estrogen, an endocrine disruptor and a dangerous chemical. It is one of the most wide-ranging substances used today. More than two billion pounds of BPA are produced annually in the United States. BPA, the building block of polycarbonate plastic and a component of epoxy resins, has been linked to several health problems including diabetes, heart disease, infertility, prostate cancer and breast cancer. BPA is used in thousands of consumer products, including food packaging and metal food and beverage containers. Here's the problem–polycarbonate plastics can leach BPA into our foods and drinks.

Although it is impossible to completely eliminate BPA from our lives, here are some steps to reduce exposure:

- Use glass or ceramic containers to store and heat foods but never plastic containers.
- Reduce or eliminate canned food and beverages. The epoxy liners of metal food and beverage cans most likely contain BPA. Since acids and alcohols can exacerbate the leaching of BPA, canned alcoholic beverages should be avoided. Specific examples include acidic canned foods such as tomatoes, tomato-based soups, citrus products, and acidic beverages like cokes. Purchase these products in glass containers instead.
- Filter your drinking and cooking water. Because detectable levels of BPA have been found in tap water, it is recommended to use a reverse osmosis and carbon filter. The cost for this water purification is usually less than $200. Since bottled water is not tested for BPA, not only is this alternative safer, but it is also less expensive in the long run than bottled water.
- Filter your shower and tub water. BPA molecules are relatively small and can be easily absorbed through the skin. To remove BPA in the bathroom, simply add a ceramic filter to your showerhead and tub. Take note of how often the filters should be changed and write it on your calendar as a reminder.
- Use unlined stainless steel travel mugs to transport beverages, particularly hot beverages such as coffee or tea. Never use plastic mugs or containers to transport beverages.
- Reduce and ultimately eliminate the use of hard plastic water bottles. While lightweight plastic bottles might be convenient, unfortunately they are made of polycarbonate plastic. Be aware that some metal water bottles contain a plastic liner which may contain BPA.
- Use wood or metal utensils. Because hard plastic stirring spoons and pancake flippers often come in contact with both food and heat, replace them with wood or metal. Also, blenders, measuring cups, and colanders can easily be replaced with metal or a glass substitute.
- Avoid the water cooler. Hard plastic five-gallon jugs used to provide "pure" water are usually made of BPA-containing polycarbonate. Tap water is the better choice here.
- Wash all plastic containers by hand.
- Throw away aged plastic containers. Hazy-looking or warped plastic containers, or ones that feel "sticky," indicate a break down and could be releasing even more BPA.
- Choose plastics with the recycling numbers 2 or 5. These are made out of far less reactive polypropylene and polyethylene.

Children and pregnant women are especially vulnerable to BPA so extra caution should be used to reduce exposure as much as possible. Read the first website below for additional information.

Following are a few links for further reading on this topic:

1) http://health.msn.com/health-topics/cancer/articlepage.aspx?cp-documentid=100176179
2) http://www.breastcancerfund.org/clear-science/chemicals-glossary/bisphenol-a.html
3) http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2010/01/18/earlyshow/health/main6110716.shtml