

Before You Take Another Bite!

What to Do About Dangerous Food Toxins

By Dr. Ayo Bankole, ND, PA-C

We don't like to think about it, but all of us are exposed to numerous toxic environmental substances every day. These environmental toxins, non-biological substances (AKA poisons), are disturbingly common, yet are documented to cause an array of illnesses. Just a few examples include different cancers, thyroid complications, and reproductive problems. People are often concerned enough to purify their water and filter their air, but did you know we accumulate most of our environmental toxins from the foods we eat? While that might seem a frightening notion, actually it's good news, because food choice represents an area over which we can exercise substantial control. And the scientific literature gives us plenty of guidance to help choose foods that minimize our risk from environmental toxins.



In part one of this article we'll detail some of the most dangerous food toxins, where you'll find them and how to avoid them. Limiting exposure to food based environmental toxins is high on the list of smart, healthy behaviors you can easily take to protect you and your family. In part two of this article, which will follow

next month, we'll examine the impact of certain foods and supplemental nutrients which actually can assist the body to do its' job of clearing toxins. We'll also look at some of the natural therapies available for removing toxins when they've accumulated to unsafe levels in the body.

Polychlorinated Biphenyls (PCBs) in Butter & Salmon

PCBs, one of the more toxic classes of chemicals contaminating our environment, were originally used as lubricants and coolants. In the 1970's PCBs were banned after research showed associations with cancer,

thyroid complications, immunity declines and behavioral problems in children. PCBs were also linked to reduced fertility, as well as memory and learning problems for adults. Yet, more than thirty years after the ban, PCBs have not yet completely broken down in the environment. They

still find their way into our food chain, often in the fish we eat.

Your highest exposure to PCBs would typically come from eating farmed Pacific salmon, butter and other dairy products and meat. One serving of farmed salmon has up to forty times

more PCBs than other foods. Based on the cancer risk the EPA recommends no more than one monthly serving of farmed salmon. Fortunately you can easily limit exposure to PCBs by choosing wild caught Atlantic salmon, and by purchasing organic instead of conventional butter.



Dioxins in Fish & Butter

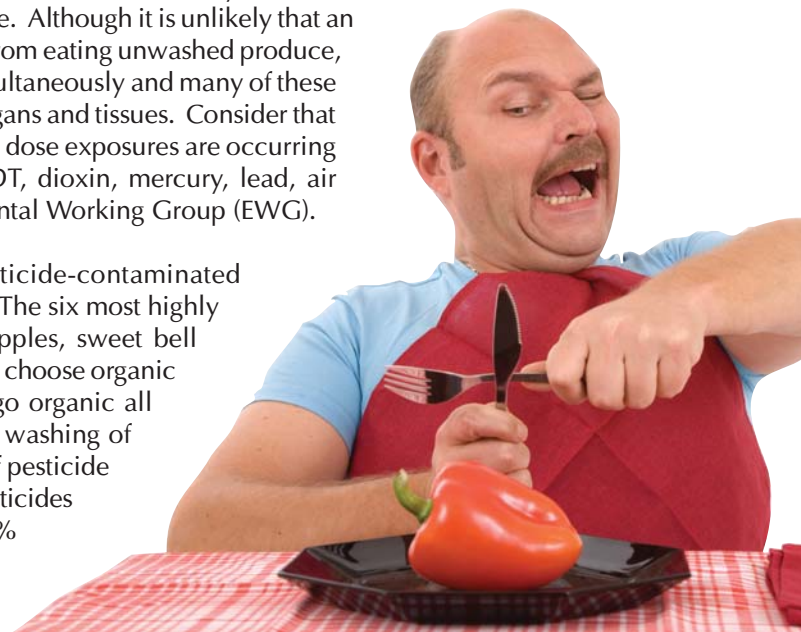
Dioxins are another group of highly toxic chemicals. The one chemical most strongly linked to cancer in animals is the dioxin, TCDD, which is also known to cause cancer in humans. Animal studies have linked TCDD to reproductive problems as well. Dioxins are formed as a byproduct of manufacturing and during the chlorination of municipal water. Even at very low levels, dioxins can cause liver damage, weight loss and disruption of the endocrine and immune systems. The Department of Health & Human Services reports that 90% of our exposure to dioxins is from the food we eat. Similar to PCBs, dioxins concentrate highest in dairy products and are also found in meat and fish.

There are a couple easy ways to avoid dioxins. First purchase organic butter and dairy products. Next, avoid farmed salmon choosing wild caught instead. Also since dioxins accumulate in the fat of fish and animals, remove the skin and other fatty portions prior to cooking and drain off the fat after cooking.

Minimize Your Exposure to Organophosphate Pesticides in Produce

In 2001, almost one billion pounds of pesticides were applied to conventionally raised U.S. crops. Imported crops often have even higher levels of exposure. Although it is unlikely that an individual will experience acute organophosphate poisoning from eating unwashed produce, the real issue is that we are exposed to multiple chemicals simultaneously and many of these chemicals, including organophosphates, accumulate in our organs and tissues. Consider that "hundreds of studies show that adverse health effects from low dose exposures are occurring in the population, caused by contamination with PCBs, DDT, dioxin, mercury, lead, air pollutants and other chemicals," according to the Environmental Working Group (EWG).

The EWG annually updates a list of the most highly pesticide-contaminated produce along with a list of the least contaminated produce. The six most highly contaminated produce in descending order are peaches, apples, sweet bell peppers, celery, nectarines and strawberries. It's a good idea to choose organic when purchasing foods from this list. If it's not practical to go organic all the time, keep in mind a study which showed that thorough washing of produce in water resulted in only a 6.8% average reduction of pesticide residue compared to a whopping 90% average reduction in pesticides that were cleaned in a 10% acetic acid wash. To make a 10% acetic acid wash simply mix 1 part vinegar with 10 parts water. The acid wash is a healthy alternative to peeling, since many nutrients in produce occur in the skin.



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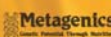


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Mercury in Fish

Some of our favorite mealtime fish, tuna, cod and haddock, unfortunately contain mercury, one of the most toxic environmental poisons. In addition to tuna, the highest quantities of mercury are found in tilefish, swordfish, shark, king mackerel, and halibut. Mercury can pass into all tissue including the brain where it is most toxic; it accumulates in kidneys requiring chelating medications to clear. The most common symptoms of mercury toxicity are ringing in the ears, tremors, hair loss and fatigue.

The EPA has a long standing warning that children and pregnant women consume no more than twelve ounces (two meals) of fish per week. However, the EWG contends (and I agree) that these guidelines are far too lenient. The EWG states "for pregnant women eating

within FDA guidelines...25% of children in utero will be exposed to levels of mercury...(with an)...increased risk of neurological damage." I advise my pregnant patients to completely avoid tuna and other fish with higher levels of mercury along with farmed salmon. I also advise that small children consume no more than twelve ounces a month of these fish. If you enjoy fish, wild salmon, Atlantic mackerel, tilapia, and sardines are just some of fish with much lower levels of heavy metals and environmental toxins and can be eaten more liberally. You can find an updated list of the best and worst fish to consume at the website of the Environmental Defense Fund. (www.edf.org)

As you can see, just a little bit of extra care with your dietary choices, allows you to

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avoid some of the worst environmental toxin issues. Next month we'll look at nutritional choices that can help the body do its' job of natural cleansing of toxins and we'll introduce some of the natural therapies available to you, if more needs to be done.

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