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Microplastics and Your Health.

Microplastics are tiny plastic fragments that can be found everywhere – including in our bodies. They have been linked to health issues like inflammation, reproductive problems, heart disease, and potential cancer risks. While more research is needed, early indications show that microplastics can carry harmful chemicals and cause physical damage affecting the gut, lungs, and brain, with immune cells struggling and working overtime to remove them.

How do microplastics get into our bodies?

- We can ingest them through food and beverages (including seafood, tea bags, bottled water), drinking water, dust.
- We can breathe them in through airborne particles.

Where are microplastics found in the body?

- Our blood, lungs, liver, kidneys, and brain.
- In the placenta, breast milk, feces, and semen.

What are the potential health impacts of microplastics in our bodies?

- Cellular Level: Oxidative stress, DNA damage, inflammation, altered gene expression.
- Gut Health: Accumulation, inflammation, potential inflammatory bowel disease, negative impact on microbiome.
- Reproductive Health: Lower sperm quality, fertility issues.

- Cardiovascular: Accumulation in plaques, linked to heart disease.
- Brain: Higher concentrations in brain tissue, potential links to dementia.
- Chemical Exposure: Carry additives (BPA, phthalates) known to disrupt hormones and cause other issues.

Aside from these health impacts, why are microplastics concerning?

- **They are persistent:** It is difficult for the body, particularly for our immune system, to break down or eliminate microplastics.
- **They carry chemicals:** Harmful chemicals, like BPA or PFAS, can leach from microplastics into the body.

Since microplastics are typically released from the breakdown of plastics, they can be made of chemicals: “forever chemicals” like phthalates that you might find in cosmetics, or chemicals such as Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances, used in non-stick cookware and even dental floss.

Chemicals like BPA, phthalates, and PFAS can mimic human hormones, the body’s chemical messengers that control processes like reproduction, growth, and metabolism. Exposure to these substances has been shown to increase the risk of everything from infertility to poorer fetal development and cancer.

If there is no government requirement for the chemicals used in plastics and other materials to be comprehensively tested for safety, there may also be unfamiliar chemicals in microplastics.

- **They accumulate in our organs:** Microplastics can build up in various organs, causing potential long-term harm.

Dr. Tracey Woodruff, Professor, Ob/Gyn, Reproductive Science at the UCSF School of Medicine, has done extensive research on microplastics. Here are two videos based on her work.

The first video is a 2-minute summary from Dr. Woodruff that answers the top searched questions on microplastics and how they impact our health:

[Do Microplastics Affect Your Health? Expert Answers to the Top Searched Questions](#)

This 18-minute video, based on Dr. Woodruff’s work, is incredibly informative as to how to naturally minimize your exposure and absorption of microplastics, and how to naturally get them out of your body.

[Microplastics Are Inside Your Body! Here's How to Get Them Out Naturally \(Tracey Woodruff\)](#)

If you can't take the time to watch this video, here is a summary of the recommendations:

Prevention

- **Food Containers:** Only use glass, ceramic, or steel to hold food and beverages, and stop heating in plastic.
- **Processed Foods:** Reduce consumption of ultra-processed foods, especially those that are wrapped using heat and stored in plastic.
- **Fresh Produce:** Increase your intake of unpackaged produce that is fresh.
- **Clear Indoor Air:** dust regularly and use a HEPA vacuum, wet mop and keep ventilation open; the biggest hidden sources of microplastics can be carpets, clothes, and furniture that constantly shed fibres.
- **Clothing:** Choose natural fibres for clothes like cotton, linen, or hemp versus nylon and polyester, which shed every time they are washed and dried.
- **Air:** Open windows during low-pollution hours. Use an air humidifier with a HEPA filter.

Diet and Detox

- **Water:** Drink filtered water. Hydration is essential as it flushes out waste, and supports the kidneys and lymphatic circulation to flush out toxins as a natural drainage network.
- **Fibre:** Eat a fibre rich diet, as fibre binds to waste and helps eliminate microplastics through the digestive tract.
- **Fermented Foods:** Strengthen your gut microbiome, which helps prevent microplastics from entering circulation: include in your diet fermented foods like yogurt, kefir, kimchi, or sauerkraut daily.
- **Antioxidants:** Include antioxidant rich foods in your diet, such as turmeric, berries, green tea, and garlic to combat oxidative stress caused by plastic exposure.
- **Activity:** Exercise regularly and get enough sleep, as these actions support your lymphatic drainage which is your body's internal cleaning network; movement also helps push waste out of tissue and into circulation for elimination.
- **Sauna:** Sauna use once or twice a week can cause excretion through sweat of certain chemicals attached to microplastics, such as BPA and Phthalates.
- **Candle Use:** Avoid burning scented candles or incense made with synthetic materials as they release airborne plastic particles.
- **Stress:** Chronic stress weakens the immune system and slows detoxification as the liver and gut are less efficient. Be intentional in how you can reduce your stress burden.

Overall...

There is no miracle supplement or detox drink that will flush microplastics from your body overnight. The best thing you can do is to reduce your exposure to microplastics and strengthen your body's natural defense system over time.

Work to protect your body from the inside out: since microscopic particles are small and persistent, some may stay in our tissue for years. When you help your body flush them out, you can build your immune system and reduce inflammation, and stop new particles from accumulating. Supporting your natural defenses is the most effective way to reduce your body's microplastic burden.

Sources

<https://magazine.hms.harvard.edu/articles/microplastics-everywhere>

<https://www.ucsf.edu/news/2024/02/427161/how-to-limit-microplastics-dangers>

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Morandini', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Rochelle Morandini

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If you would like to contribute or have ideas about what you would like to see in the ReFresh series, we would love to hear from you: contact rochelle@bcpvpa.bc.ca.