PFAS
in Foodware & Packaging:
What You Need to Know

Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS) are a group of human-made chemicals that build up over time in the environment, animals, and humans; and can be harmful to health. Understanding which products are likely to contain PFAS and how to avoid buying them helps reduce your personal exposure and decreases the amount of PFAS entering the environment and drinking water supplies. For an introduction to PFAS, read the "*What are PFAS & Why Should I Care?*"* factsheet.

Many foodware and food packaging are coated in PFAS to achieve water-, oil-, and grease-resistance which increases durability. Examples of packaging and foodware that may contain PFAS include:

- Nonstick cookware
- Paper plates & disposable tableware
- Coated food packaging
- Bakery bags
- Pizza boxes & takeaway containers

When PFAS-containing foodware and packaging are used, some PFAS can transfer to food leading to direct consumption of PFAS. Note that higher temperatures and longer durations of time can lead to greater amounts of PFAS in food. Once disposable products are thrown away, they enter a landfill and provide a pathway for PFAS to enter the environment. When PFAS-containing paper and fiber products are composted, PFAS remains in the compost and enters the environment when it is used.

Rules-of-Thumb

In general, items making the following claims are likely to contain PFAS:

- *Oil-, grease-, and water-resistant*
- *Nonstick cookware that cannot be heated above a certain temperature*

Foodware and packaging primarily contribute to human exposure to PFAS from:

- Direct consumption of food containing PFAS from foodware and packaging
- Drinking water that is impacted from disposing or composting of PFAS containing food packaging

Be Skeptical of PFAS-Free Claims

Some nonstick cookware have packaging labels that may lead to confusion. Some companies state that their products are PFC-free, PFOA-free and/or PFOS-free, but such statements only cover some specific PFAS chemicals. They are likely still using different PFAS in their products such as "PTFE" (polytetrafluoroethylene).

Certain cookware materials can leach compounds when heated to high temperatures or exposed to acidic foods. Although PFOA (perfluorooctanoic acid) was banned in cookware in 2014, other PFAS including "PTFE" (polytetrafluoroethylene) are still used to produce nonstick cookware today. When scratched or used at high temperatures, nonstick coatings can break down and release PFAS into food, wash water, and the air.

Since most PFAS are considered proprietary ingredients, manufacturers do not disclose their use of PFAS to purchasers. A study* from the Center for Environmental Health found 57% of the disposable foodware products tested contained PFAS and recommends avoiding molded fiber foodware.

Be Skeptical of Green Messaging!

Many molded fiber and recycled paper disposable tableware are being advertised as "compostable" but are treated with chemicals such as PFAS to achieve water-, and grease-resistant properties. PFAS can be mixed into the paper pulp during manufacturing and be present without an obvious physical coating.

PFAS are frequently found in food packaging due to water-resistant and grease-repellent properties. A 2017 study* found 46% of the food contact papers (e.g., wrappers for sandwiches, burgers, desserts, etc.) and 20% of paperboard samples collected from fast food restaurants contained PFAS.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Use cookware without a nonstick coating, such as stainless steel pots and pans
  - o Proper care and use of nonstick coatings such as using low-medium heat and avoiding surface scratches can reduce the likelihood of PFAS exposures
- Choose reusable containers!

  - o Most reusable item materials, such as glass, durable plastic, and ceramics, are inherently PFAS-free making them a great alternative that protect both human health and reduce waste!
  - o Bring reusable containers to restaurants and manage your own leftovers
- When disposable is the only realistic option:
  - o Choose materials that are wax-coated or truly uncoated
  - o Choose products that do not advertise oil-, grease-, and water-resistant claims
  - o Avoid products that consistently test positive for PFAS such as those made from molded fiber
- Only compost food waste – Do not compost containers and packaging that may contain PFAS as it can lead to contamination of soil and the environment

*Visit https://www.newmoa.org/pfas-in-consumer-products-factsheets/ for more information, including links to the mentioned studies

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