

2024

# KEEPING PFAS OFF YOUR PLATE

PFAS are a category of chemicals that are harmful to human health. We can come into contact with PFAS through our diets.

Learn more about the steps you can take to reduce you and your family's PFAS exposure here:



# WHAT ARE PFAS?

**PFAS (perfluoroalkyl substances)** are a diverse group of synthetic chemicals that have been in use since the 1950s. They are resistant to grease, oil, water, and heat. Because of this, they are well-suited for many consumer and industrial uses. Products with PFAS include stain resistant clothing and furniture, food packaging, cookware, cosmetics, and cleaning supplies.

## What are the dangers of PFAS?

PFAS exposure may be detrimental to human health. Studies have linked PFAS with:

- Increased cholesterol levels
- Kidney and testicular cancers
- Lower antibody response
- Pre-eclampsia or high blood pressure in pregnancy
- Decreased birth weight
- Changes in liver enzymes

## How have PFAS polluted our environment?

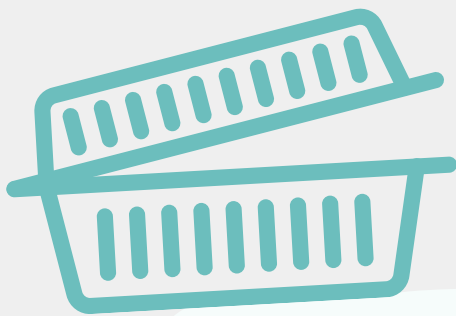
Because of their widespread use, it's no surprise that PFAS have made their way into our environment. Once there, PFAS take a long time to breakdown.

They are known as "forever chemicals" because they remain in the environment for so long. PFAS have been detected in the air, water, and soils across the United States and around the world.

# HOW ARE WE EXPOSED TO PFAS THROUGH OUR DIETS?

## Plants + Animals

Once in the environment, PFAS are absorbed by living things and spread through the food chain. Over time, PFAS can build up in plants and animals grown or raised with contaminated soil, water, or feed. Because PFAS are so widely distributed, they have been detected in a number of plant and animal food products.



## Food packaging

Due to their oil resistant properties, PFAS are used in many food contact materials. They are found in grease resistant papers, paperboard food containers, food cans, candy wrappers, and more. PFAS products are particularly common in the fast-food industry. Microwavable products also use PFAS in their packaging because of their high melting points. Studies have shown that PFAS can migrate from these materials into the food itself.

## Cookware



PFAS are used in non-stick coatings on cookware, pots, pans, and utensils. These coatings prevent food from sticking during cooking and make cleanup afterwards easy. Unfortunately, low amounts of PFAS have been shown to migrate from non-stick cookware to food itself. High temperatures and repeated use of cookware make it more likely that PFAS will spread to food. If the coating becomes damaged, it can begin to chip away, further tainting food items.



## Breastmilk

If a lactating parent has been exposed to PFAS, their infant can become exposed through breastfeeding. Babies can also be exposed through baby formula mixed with PFAS contaminated water. Breastmilk consumption is the main source of PFAS exposure in breast-fed infants.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

**Drinking water is the primary way we come into contact with PFAS, but the foods we eat are also a major pathway. Completely eliminating PFAS from our diets is impossible. Still, there are some steps you can take to reduce your exposure.**

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### **Don't eat microwave popcorn**

It may be unrealistic to cut out all foods exposed to PFAS treated packaging from your diet. However, levels of PFAS found in microwave popcorn are particularly high. The high heat of the popping process allows for PFAS to transfer from the popcorn bag to the popcorn itself. Instead of microwave popcorn, you can use a hot air popper or pop your own popcorn on the stove.

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### **Don't use damaged cookware**

Through repeated use, non-stick cookware will begin to scratch and chip. When this occurs, it is more likely that PFAS will transfer to foods. Using metalware on non-stick surfaces can cause increased scratching. If a pot or pan becomes damaged, it might be time to get a replacement.

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# WHAT YOU CAN DO

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## **Consider alternative PFAS free cookware**

If you are shopping for new cookware, make sure to look at PFAS free options. There are many materials such as stainless steel and ceramic that are safer to use. Alternative options are available at a variety of price points.

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## **Continue to breast feed your baby**

Current research suggests that the benefits of breastfeeding far outweigh the risks of potential PFAS exposure. Studies show that breastfeeding confers many health benefits to infants and their mothers. The focus should instead be on reducing maternal exposure. If there are specific concerns of PFAS exposure, please discuss breastfeeding options with your obstetrician and pediatrician.

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## **Check fish, game, and agricultural advisories**

Wild caught fish and game can be sources of PFAS exposure if they live in contaminated habitats. Check your local or state health and environmental quality departments for fish or hunting advisories. Also, please follow advisories on agricultural products in your area.

# REDUCING PFAS IN THE ENVIRONMENT

As long as PFAS remain in our environment, we will continue to be exposed. Efforts to limit the use of PFAS and to remediate their contamination are crucial. You can help by taking the time to learn more about these chemicals. You can also stay updated with the steps state and federal agencies are taking to address concerns around PFAS.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



Region 1: New England  
**PEHSU**  
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