

Bisphenol A (BPA) – Is it REALLY that bad?

Actually you may be surprised. I just finished a webinar on Bisphenol A (BPA) with the International Food Information Council. We heard interesting reports from a toxicologist, a consumer educator, and a risk management specialist on the call. Their reports were very interesting.

39% of consumers report that chemicals in food is the most important food safety issue. Only food borne illness was ranked higher (44%). There is a lot of consumer confusion and fear due media reporting and interpretation of conflicting studies on BPA. BPA is a plasticizing agent that is used in water bottles, lining of food cans and other food grade plastics. Only 1% of BPA in food is absorbed by the body, and the actual amount of BPA in food is low. The rest of the substance is broken down and excreted in the urine. No studies have shown a direct link to problems in humans. The problems reportedly found in mice are related to their unique metabolism.

BPA plays a major role in protecting the interior of cans from chemicals dissolving into the food during storage. Those dissolved chemicals are known to cause toxicity when consumed in larger amounts. Scientists are concerned because there are no known replacements for BPA and not using it is less safe than using it. “The dose makes the poison” is a statement from Paracelsus in 1503 that basically means ‘the more of a substance taken in, the more likely it will become toxic’. Based on scientific studies, someone would have to consume the contents of 14 million cans of food or beverage to reach the FDA level of concern for toxicity.

Then why is everyone so upset? People filter information through “perception filters” of danger, fear, or un-concern, as does the media. If there is “low familiarity and high dread” then public opinion turns to outrage with the accompanying demand that something “be done”. If, in addition, there is a feeling of ‘no control’ and a potential ‘catastrophic effect’, fear increases. Our brains are programmed for survival and fear is a vital part of that instinct.

We need to put the risk in perspective. If the concern about BPA causes a decrease in consumption of canned fruits and vegetables, are the consequences of obesity, diabetes and their complications acceptable? Also, if the concern is children’s health, home-made baby food has been shown to have more bacterial contamination (which is more harmful) than the small amount of BPA in baby food/bottles.

Is BPA dangerous, poisonous? Only you can answer that question based on the most current information and your own perceptions.

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