

## Are Your Food Storage Containers Poisoning Your Family?

By Sloan Barnett

What could be easier than going to the refrigerator, pulling out the plastic container you put last night's leftovers in, and popping it into the microwave for a quick zap? Instant hot meal in three minutes. Also, depending on the kind of container, instant shot of potentially toxic chemicals.

Clear polycarbonate plastic containers marked with a number 7 on the bottom, like most plastic baby bottles, can leach bisphenol A, the known hormone disrupter, cancer causer in lab animals, and possible source of hyperactivity and other behavioral disorders in children. So number 7 plastics are a no-no. Second, plastic foams-like those used in coffee cups, food containers from fast food restaurants, and instant soups and noodle products-are made of number 6 polystyrene. Styrene is known to leach from such containers. It is a possible hormone and reproductive system disrupter and is listed as a possible carcinogen by the International Agency for Research for Cancer. Third, flexible plastics made of polyvinyl chloride (PVC), marked with the number 3 on the bottom, contain phthalate compounds, including DEHP, which is linked to a host of problems with the liver, kidney, and spleen and is banned in Europe.

These plastics are not good things to have around the house--much less the kitchen--but that's often where you find them. That stretchy, sticky plastic film you wrap the kids' sandwiches in and use to cover leftovers? It's more than likely PVC film loaded with phthalate. Those clear plastic containers some deli foods come in? They've got bisphenol A in them. Think of these chemicals as evil genies hiding in your containers and wraps. Pop any of these things into the microwave--which is what many of us do all the time--and you're essentially setting those genies free.

There are two simple solutions to this problem. The first is to make sure that any plastics you use in your kitchen are marked number 1, 2, 4, or 5. These are the safest ones. For example, there are some brands of cling wrap, bags, and containers that are made of safer plastics. The problem is the boxes they come in don't often say which number plastic they use. But there are lots of common brand versions of these products that are safe, far more than we can list here. So here's my tip: Go to Green Guide, the Web site run by National Geographic magazine ([thegreenguide.com](http://thegreenguide.com)). Click on the section called "Buying Guides," and then click on "Plastic Containers" under "Kitchen." That's where you'll find an extensive list of which are safe and which are not.

My own choice, however, is just to use glass containers. I bypass the plastic problem altogether. With clear glass, I know I'm working with a recyclable material, that they'll get safely clean when I wash them, and that I don't have to keep buying more every few weeks. And when I open the refrigerator door and look at the glass containers in there, I know immediately what's in them.

Original at: <http://ezinearticles.com/?Are-Your-Food-Storage-Containers-Poisoning-Your-Family?&id=1516355>

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