



How Can Chemicals Leak into Food?

We've been told often enough that we are what we eat – but the packaging in which our food is stored, heated and served might be equally important in determining how healthy or dangerous our diet is. As part of a new initiative geared towards raising awareness around chemicals leaching into food, the Abu Dhabi Agriculture and Food Safety Authority (ADAFSA) have launched a social media campaign.

In it, they warn against heating up leftovers or microwave meals in plastic containers, since the scientific community is now beginning to understand more about the damaging effect that chemicals such as bisphenol A (BPA), phthalates and fluorine can have on the human body. As such, they are encouraging people to take other measures to ensure they avoid these harmful contaminants.

Dangerous contaminants

When food or drink is stored inside a container, it can sometimes inherit some of the properties of those materials, especially when heated. Takeaways are an increasingly attractive proposition for residents in the UAE and beyond; indeed, [a recent survey](#) revealed that over a quarter of Americans order takeaway food at least once a week. However, many people are not aware of the possible consequences of using such services.

If steaming hot food is left for too long inside plastic containers, it can absorb chemicals and toxins from the material. Even paper and aluminium alternatives are not free from danger, causing concern and confusion among those who wish to take advantage of the convenience of takeaways – or of storing leftovers in Tupperware – without risking their health.

Learning the consequences

Studies are only now revealing the damaging impacts that these substances can have on human health. BPA, often added to plastic to make it more robust, has shown signs of mimicking endocrine disruptors, which have been linked to all kinds of health complications, including infertility, breast and prostate cancer and metabolic disorders.

“Low doses of these chemicals may be as impactful as high doses of exposure,” [explains Leonardo Trasande](#), an expert on the subject. “Even the lowest level of exposure can cause serious, permanent and lifelong consequences as a result of these preventable exposures.”



What can be done?

BPA and other damaging plastics are not just found in polystyrene or plastic takeaway containers, but aluminium cans as well. Therefore, you should seek to buy brown or white paperboard receptacles, since these do not contain the offending substances. Glass jars are an ideal substitute for canned goods.

Meanwhile, it's still important to ensure you encompass a wide selection of foods from all the major groups (with a balance of proteins, carbohydrates, vitamins, minerals and fats) to ensure you stay healthy. So-called superfoods like [avocados can be instrumental in keeping the doctor away](#), but just mixing up your diet to include plenty of fruits, vegetables, grains, pulses and wholemeal food sources is normally enough to counteract any damaging chemical contamination and keep you in good shape.