



CAN NONSTICK COOKWARE BE TOXIC?

While easy to clean and good for low-fat cooking, Teflon and similar brands of nonstick cookware can release a toxic chemical called PFOA (perfluorooctanoic acid) when overheated. This has prompted the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to urge companies to phase out the use of PFOA in manufacturing processes.

PFOA is used to make fluoropolymers, which are the basis for Teflon and other brands of nonstick cookware, as well as a range of oil and water repellent coatings for carpets, furniture, leather, and food packaging.

Although Teflon is considered safe under normal cooking conditions, it can release PFOA fumes when temperatures exceed 500°F (260°C), as the coating breaks apart. Alarmingly, after just two to five minutes, if left to heat up dry on the stove, cookware coated with Teflon can exceed 570°F (300°C), according to the Environmental Working Group, an independent nonprofit consumer organization.

While there's no direct evidence of harm to humans, animal studies show that PFOA can cause reproductive problems, enlargement of the liver, negative effects on the brain, immune

suppression, and even cancer.

Two studies reviewed by the European Food Safety Authority found that PFOA exposure in pregnant women was linked with reduced birth weight in babies. Another study from the UCLA School of Public Health discovered women with higher levels of PFOA and another chemical in their blood took longer to become pregnant.

Since PFOA has been detected at low levels in 98 percent of Americans' blood and 100 percent of newborns, and it takes years to eliminate, the Environmental Working Group believes we should look for safer ways to prevent food from sticking.

5 tips for using nonstick pans

- ▶ Use stainless steel instead, with a little oil, juice, or water.
- ▶ Invest in cast iron, which develops a natural nonstick surface with time, or try the enameled variety, which is instantly nonstick.
- ▶ If you love Teflon, never preheat it dry, and use low or medium heat.
- ▶ If the nonstick coating cracks, chips, or bubbles, throw out the pan.
- ▶ Make sure that an exhaust fan or window is open during cooking.

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