

# Simple Tips to Prevent Chemical Exposure through Breast Milk and Other Foods

We are all exposed to chemicals in our environments from our everyday beauty products, to household cleaners, to the foods we eat. These chemicals, sometimes referred to as toxicants, can also be transferred from mothers to their babies via breast milk (1).

Many of the environmental toxicants that are commonly measured in breast milk are from the mother's diet, in addition to flame retardant chemicals like PBDEs (2).

## Some facts:

- **Breastfeeding provides protection against some cancers and other illnesses that can result, in part, from chemicals in our environment.**
- **Research suggests that breastfeeding reduces the impact of harmful environmental chemicals (1).**

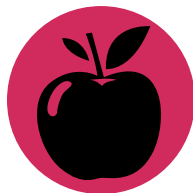


The benefits of breastfeeding far outweigh the risk of exposure to environmental toxicants that are transferred from mother to baby through breast milk. In fact, national and international health organizations recommend breastfeeding despite potential exposures through breast milk.

Infant formula also contains toxicants.

There are ways to **reduce** your exposure to these **chemicals**.

Follow these tips when **purchasing**, **preparing**, and **storing** food, which can reduce your exposure to environmental toxins.



## Purchasing Food

**Avoid pesticides, which can also be transferred into breast milk, by buying organic produce when possible.**

- The Environmental Working Group's "Dirty Dozen" and "Clean Fifteen" lists (based on pesticide contamination) are useful guides for buying fruits and vegetables (3,4).
- Thoroughly wash conventional fresh produce and rice before consuming.

**Purchase fresh, frozen, or cartoned instead of canned foods when possible**

- Limit consumption of canned foods to avoid BPA (especially pastas and soups).
- Rinsing canned fruit or vegetables may reduce the amount of BPA (5).



- Purchase BPA – Free Brands (e.g. Kroger's Simple Truth, Amy's, Earth's Best Organic).

## Food Preparation

**Wash your hands before preparing and eating foods.**

**Use plastics carefully**

- Avoid microwaving food or drinks in plastic containers.
- Cover microwavable foods with paper towel instead of plastic.
- Avoid using plastics for hot liquids.
- Avoid reusing single use plastics.
- Use a wood cutting board.



## Sources

1. Nickerson, Krista. "Environmental Contaminants in Breast Milk." *Journal of Midwifery & Women's Health* 51.1 (2006): 26-34. Print.
2. Gina, M. Solomon, and M. Weiss Pilar. "Chemical Contaminants in Breast Milk: Time Trends and Regional Variability." *Environmental Health Perspectives*.6 (2002): A339. Print.
3. Environmental Working Group. Dirty Dozen. (2018). <https://www.ewg.org/foodnews/dirty-dozen.php>
4. Environmental Working Group. Clean Fifteen. (2018) <https://www.ewg.org/foodnews/clean-fifteen.php>
5. Environmental Working Group. Bisphenol A - Toxic plastics chemical in canned food: consumer tips to avoid BPA exposure. (2017) <https://www.ewg.org/research/bisphenol/consumer-tips-avoid-bpa-exposure>

## Food Storage

**Polycarbonate plastics leach low levels of BPA into food or liquids (5).**

### **Choose plastics carefully**

- Safer Plastics (BPA free) - #1, #2, #4 - avoid #7
- Store breast milk in BPA free bottles, like Medela (Medela pumps are also BPA free.)
- Use plastic alternatives when possible (e.g. glass bottles)

**Black Girls' Breastfeeding Club**  
**blackgirlsbreastfeedingclub.com**

IG: @blackgirlsbreastfeedingclub

**For more information on how environmental chemicals can affect you or your child's health visit**  
**knowbetterlivebetter.org**

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## Additional Resources

1. **CDC Breastfeeding. Environmental Exposures/Toxicants.**

<https://www.cdc.gov/breastfeeding/breastfeeding-special-circumstances/environmental-exposures/index.html>

2. **Environmental Working Group.** <https://www.ewg.org/>

3. **Georgia Fresh for Less.** <https://www.wholesomewavegeorgia.org/find-a-market/>

4. **Know Better Live Better Campaign, Emory Children's Environmental Health Center.** <http://nursing.emory.edu/c-chem2/cotc-kblb.html>