

Researchers find industrial chemicals in food samples

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Researchers at The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston (UTHealth) have discovered phthalates, industrial chemicals, in common foods purchased in the United States. Phthalates can be found in a variety of products and food packaging material, child-care articles and medical devices.

"Although it's not completely understood how phthalates get into our food, packaging may be a contributor to the levels of the toxin in food," said lead investigator Arnold Schechter, M.D., M.P.H., professor of environmental health at The University of Texas School of Public Health Dallas Regional campus, part of UTHealth.

The study is published in the online edition of [Environmental Health Perspectives](#). Schechter believes this is the first study to compile an analysis of phthalates in foods found in the United States. National Institutes of Health researcher Linda Birnbaum, Ph.D., is the senior author on the study publication.

"It's unfortunate that we have these toxic chemicals in our bodies," said Schechter. "However, this is not a cause for alarm because the amount of phthalates found in the food falls below what the [Environmental Protection Agency](#) considers safe. But it is cause for concern because these toxins and others previous reported by this group do not belong in our food or our bodies."

Phthalates are [synthetic compounds](#) that are used as a plasticizers and in

[personal care products](#) such a shampoo, soap, perfumes and other common [household products](#). According to Schechter, exposure to phthalates has been reported to be associated with harmful effects including reproductive changes such as damage in sperm, premature breast development in girls and premature birth.

A sample of 72 commonly consumed foods including pizza, meats and beverages from supermarkets in Albany, N.Y., were purchased and tested for the presence of phthalates. Researchers detected some level of phthalate in every food product they sampled, Schechter said.

Schechter believes further research is necessary to fully characterize phthalates in U.S. foods.

Provided by University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston

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