

Food Packaging and Human Health - Fact Sheet



Food packaging is highly essential for protecting and handling food from farm to fork. However, packaging is also a source of chemical contamination of food.



WHAT IS IN CONTACT WITH FOOD?

Food packaging consists of many different materials and combinations thereof, e.g., plastics, paper and board, metals, glass, adhesives, coatings, printing inks.

Not only packaging, but also other items contact food - collectively they are known as food contact articles.



WHAT BECOMES PART OF THE FOOD?

Some chemicals transfer from food packaging into the food. This process is called chemical migration.

Packaging material, type of food, temperature, and storage time are factors affecting the migration of chemicals.

CONCERNS AND KNOWLEDGE GAPS

Consumers are constantly exposed to mixtures of chemicals migrating from food packaging.

Some chemicals commonly found in food packaging have been associated with certain diseases. The toxicity of many chemicals used in food packaging is not completely understood or even not known at all.

Such knowledge gaps may hinder a full safety assessment of food packaging.



CONSUMER EXPECTATIONS AND LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

In many countries, it is required by law that packaging shall not compromise the chemical safety of food.

However legislation does not provide guidance on how to fulfill these requirements.

REDUCE CHEMICAL MIGRATION BY UNDERSTANDING THE PRINCIPLES



Chemical migration increases at higher temperatures. Heat (and microwave) foods in suitable inert containers.



In general, migration levels increase over time. Limit migration by shortening the storage time of foods.



Small packaging formats have a high surface-to-volume ratio enabling higher migration levels. Avoid small portion sizes.



Many chemicals migrate at higher levels in fatty and/or acidic foods than in aqueous foods. Prefer inert containers for fatty and hot foods.

For more information on what you can do: www.foodpackagingforum.org/reducing-chemical-exposure

Food Packaging Forum raises awareness for safe food packaging. By relaying information on health hazards potentially originating from food packaging, we aim to protect public health.

Our website provides the latest news, summary articles, and background knowledge about all issues concerning food packaging and human health.



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