

Detoxify Your Life

By Rachel Abrams, M.D.

What, exactly, IS detoxification and why do we care?

Detoxification is the process by which our bodies take chemical substances that are potentially harmful through the skin, air and digestive system and transform them (primarily in the liver) so that the body can safely get rid of them. This works well for most medications, alcohol, and some chemicals that we come into contact with. However, there are a large number of toxins (pesticides, heavy metals, plasticizers) that we actually cannot detoxify in the body and we simply store in our fat cells.

Given that we have created more than 80,000 chemicals since World War II and only a fraction of these have been tested, there is room to be concerned about the health risks we face. No other generation has been exposed to the wide variety of chemicals that our children have and the effects are still unknown. Research continues to come to light on the potential endocrine disrupting or cancer-causing effects of some of these chemicals (note the recent debate in the California legislature regarding the common flame retardants—and their hormonal effects on people and animals).

Avoiding toxins entirely is not possible. So what can a responsible citizen do besides be concerned? The most important thing to realize is that a healthy body—with love, good sleep, good food, exercise and minimal stress—can usually deal with a toxic load without untoward effects. So being healthy in general will protect you.

There are also some simple common sense steps that we can all take to limit our (and the earth's!) toxic load. Here are some tips:

- Get rid of Teflon (polytetrafluoroethylene, non-stick) pans.
- Avoid plastic bottles made of polycarbonate (#7, which contains BPA).
- Do not eat or drink items heated in plastic.
- Prefer metal, ceramic, or glass containers, especially for hot and acidic foods.
- Substitute nontoxic alternatives for chemical pesticides for home and garden.
- Select “green cleaners” rather than toxic cleaning agents.
- Don't forget that the skin also takes in toxins and purchase bath and beauty products that are free of:
 - “Fragrance”
 - Alpha and Beta Hydroxy Acids
 - Parabens
 - Triethanolamine
 - Iodopropynyl butylcarbamate
 - Triclosan (antimicrobial soaps)

- Use www.cosmeticsdatabase.com, www.safecosmetics.org to get more information on safe products.
- Avoid PVC (vinyl) products.
- Choose “green” paints, finishes, structural materials and insulation for any remodeling projects.
- Choose fish that are not carrying high levels of mercury and are not endangered (www.seafoodwatch.org). If the whole fish fits on your plate, mercury is likely not a problem.
- Eat organic meat, milk, and egg products. This is even more important than eating organic produce, as the animals concentrate the fat-soluble toxins of all the grains that they eat into their flesh and only release them into their milk or eggs, making milk, meat and eggs potentially the highest source of pesticides in the diet. It is also important to avoid bovine growth hormone (banned in Europe), which is given to cows to increase milk production. Its effects on humans is unclear, but concerning.
- Eat primarily organic produce (www.foodnews.org). This list helps you choose the foods that are MOST important to buy organic since they have the highest content of pesticides. Remember to talk to your farmer’s market vendors, as many local farmers may not be certified organic, but still may not use spray pesticides on their produce.

Highest Pesticide Content (listed worst to best)	Lowest in Pesticides (listed best to worst)
• Peaches	• Onions
• Apples	• Avocado
• Bell Peppers	• Sweet Corn (Frozen)
• Celery	• Pineapples
• Nectarines	• Mango
• Strawberries	• Sweet Peas (Frozen)
• Cherries	• Asparagus
• Lettuce	• Kiwi
• Grapes (imported)	• Bananas
• Pears	• Cabbage
• Spinach	• Broccoli
• Potatoes	• Eggplant

And, as I always like to say to my patients, take baby steps! Adding one item at a time is a fine way to start. And don’t obsess! It’s bad for you health!