

Teflon - Modern Convenience or Health Hazard?

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by Jeannine Lee

Teflon, modern convenience or health hazard? You know the stuff. Non-stick cookware. It can make cooking easier, but like most modern conveniences, it is important to look at health consequences for both ourselves, and our planet. **Dupont, creators of Teflon, are aware that there are some toxic hazards with the use of their product.** It is fairly common knowledge that the fumes given off by Teflon cookware, even at low temperatures, kill birds. Dupont tells us that the cookware would have to be heated to 600 degrees for it to break down and begin to emit fumes toxic to humans. Because they believe that this is a condition that is unlikely to happen in the home kitchen, they claim their product is not a threat to human health.

The Environmental Working Group is a non-profit environmental advocacy group that commissioned tests to be performed on Teflon. The tests showed that a Teflon pan reached 721 degrees when it was heated on high for just five minutes. (I've heated a pan on high for five minutes or more in my kitchen more than once. It is most definitely doable in the home kitchen.) **At 680 degrees the pans release six toxic gases, including two carcinogens, two global pollutants, and MFA which is a chemical that is lethal to humans even in low doses.**

The main culprit is perflouroctanoic acid or PFOA. A suspected carcinogen, it is found in varying amounts in a variety of products, and it has a widespread presence in the environment. There is apparently no data to show that PFOA gets into humans through the use of cookware, but studies have found that this chemical is in the bloodstream of nearly all Americans.

Teflon cookware is not the only source of PFOA in our environment. It is also found in grease-resistant packaging such as:

- Pizza boxes
- Microwave popcorn bags
- Water and stain-resistant clothing
- Household items such as Gore-Tex and StainMaster
- Coated paper plates
- Cardboard takeout containers
- Auto parts
- Other manufacturing components

Because it is man-made and not found in nature there is nothing that will break it down. It just accumulates.

There are better choices for cookware. See http://www.eartheasy.com/article_healthy_cookware.htm for more information and alternatives.