FOOD

10 Foods That Probably Have Unsafe Amounts of Heavy Metals, According to Experts

By bestfolkmedicine · 21/02/2023 · 7 min read



The health risks of lead and other toxic metals have been known for some time now (decades), but the efforts to remove them from our foods are still ongoing.

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To that extent, the FDA released a set of guidelines for the acceptable levels of lead in food often consumed by babies and children.

This draft arrives after almost two years after the Congressional report that shocked the public because it informed of baby food products by seven companies with high levels of toxins.

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The list of toxins in food includes lead, but also mercury, cadmium, and arsenic.

The Closer to Zero Initiative: Will the Contaminants in the Food Be Removed once and for all?

The new set of guidelines is part of the *Closer to Zero* initiative by the FDA. This plan aims to gradually decrease the contaminants present in food products consumed by babies and kids.

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In the ongoing effort to protect the youngest population from heavy metal toxicity, they set forward a metal limit of 10 parts per billion in baby food products and 20 ppb in other foods often consumed by kids.

According to Dr. Deane Falcone, Ph.D. and the chief scientific officer at Crop One, a clean-water hydroponic vertical farming company, this is a suitable balance because we can't expect zero.

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This would end the production of food and close a lot of businesses.

Is There Such a Thing as a "Safe Level" of Heavy Metals?

According to research, there's no safe level of consumption of heavy metals.

Adults may tolerate low exposure to heavy metals; however, for babies and kids, the effects of the exposure are much more serious, particularly on their brain development.

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Even low exposure to toxic metals over a certain period of time increases the risk of behavioral disorders, neurocognitive disorders, impaired brain development, etc.

Falcone notes that the road to holding manufacturers accountable is long.

Keeping up with the guidelines isn't still mandatory so Falcone finds awareness of the issue is essential.

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By increasing people's awareness, consumers would ask more from regulatory bodies and ultimately, from the people who make/grow the food.

Education about Heavy Metals in Food Is Pivotal

There's optimism in the reduction of heavy metals in food if the education of people continues, according to Dr. Faclone.

Parents tend to be more aware of what they give their kids to eat. This is a transformative point in time and we need to demand better quality and nutritive value throughout the food industry.

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Knowing this, it's beneficial to learn more about foods that may contain heavy metals. Below are 10 foods that may contain an unsafe amount of heavy metals and their consumption should be minimal.

10 Foods with Unsafe Levels of Heavy Metals

1. **Fruit juices**

The next time before you reach for a glass of apple juice to give to your kid, stop and think.

According to the FDA, they've been onto fruit juice through the Closer to Zero Plan in order to decrease the exposure to heavy metals of babies and kids through its consumption.

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The guidelines from the draft from April 2022 established that apple juices should not contain levels of lead that go above 10 ppb while other juices shouldn't go over 20 ppb.

2. **Baby food**

It would be every parent's nightmare to hear that the baby food they give to their kids is full of neurotoxins.

This nightmare became a reality in 2021 when a report found that several popular brands of baby food had a higher than the recommended amount of heavy metals.

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The list was shocking: “177 times the lead level, 91 times the arsenic level, 69 times the cadmium level, and 5 times the mercury level”.

Despite the FDA’s efforts to reduce heavy metals in food consumed by the most vulnerable population, the guidelines don’t legally mandate changes in the agricultural and food industries.

So the effects of the guideline are questionable.

3. **Dark chocolate**

Although it’s praised as the healthiest type of chocolate with a variety of health benefits such as antioxidants and anti-inflammatories, you may need to watch the amounts of it you consume.

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This is because a 2022 Consumer Reports discovered dozens of dark chocolate brands with lead and cadmium beyond the limits set by the state of California. The report noted that cadmium contaminated the cocoa beans and the tree absorbed the metal as it grew.

Lead is present in cacao pods’ shells. As the pods are being harvested, the beans absorb the lead from the dirt and dust.

4. **Rice**

A widely available grain, rice is frequently eaten by millions of people. It’s inexpensive and filling.

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It’s also the base for numerous brands of cereals that children consume. According to FDA, the lead content in dry cereal should be reduced to 20 ppb. The Consumer Reports in 2021 noted that products that contain rice like cereals are among the highest sources of heavy metals, inorganic arsenic in particular. The crops of rice absorb ten times more arsenic than other grains do, explains the non-profit consumer group.

When possible, switch to better quality grains like millet, buckwheat, barley, farro, etc.

5. **Leafy greens**

Leafy green salad is an excellent way to add a variety of nutrients to your diet. However, there are some negative sides to leafy greens.

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These veggies are usually grown in soil and if the soil has heavy metal traces, lettuce and leafy greens such as spinach are prone to absorbing them.

Kale, Brussels sprouts, and cabbage are more prone to absorbing contaminants, particularly in the leaves, than some other veggies.

In 2021, the non-profit group As You Sow discovered dangerous levels of cadmium in spinach sold in Target, Trader Joe's, and Safeway.

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6. **Protein powder**

Protein powders are increasingly popular among people who want to build muscle mass and those who don't consume meat.

However, it's essential to know that not all of the protein powders on the market are made the same.

Some of them, both whey and plant-based ones, were found to contain a high amount of lead in a study from 2018 conducted by the Clean Label Project.

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Some of the plant-based protein powders they tested contained twice the lead amount, as well as cadmium, mercury, and arsenic.

The presence of heavy toxins in these powders may be due to the location where the ingredients are sourced, i.e., contaminated soil.

7. **Spices**

There's rarely a person who dislikes spices-they add so much taste to our meals. And, plenty of them offer impressive health advantages.

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However, according to Consumer Reports, several spices sold in large retail stores had almost a third of high levels of lead, arsenic, and cadmium.

The good news is that most spices didn't go over the test limits so you needn't give up spices, but rather be more careful when choosing a brand.

8. **Bone broth**

Although praised for a long list of health advantages, bone broth may contain dangerous toxins.

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Namely, as the bones are being simmered, they release all the magnesium and iron which is great for you. But, the broth may also be filled with toxins.

This is because farm animals' bones may contain high levels of lead.

In a 2013 study, it was concluded that lead was present in bone broth at high levels (even in organic sources) when compared to the tap water used for the recipe. If you don't want to stop consuming this soup, it's pivotal to consume it moderately to reduce your exposure to these toxins.

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9. **Fish**

Although it's praised for a variety of health benefits, fish pollution is a huge issue. Namely, certain fish are full of a mercury compound known as methylmercury. The contamination with mercury in fish happens through their main food sources, that is, algae.

In one study, among the 89 people in the US, 89 percent of them had high levels of mercury in their blood.

To get the benefits of consuming fish, avoid the ones that have been linked with mercury absorption like tilefish, swordfish, and yellowtail.

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Choose ones with lower amounts like canned sardines or the Atlantic herring.

10. **Root veggies**

Root veggies like carrots and sweet potatoes are prone to contamination through the soil.

And, purchasing the all-organic options doesn't make a huge difference because organic farming methods also require water and soil.

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The levels of toxins in the soil vary. According to CNN Health, one sweet potato contained times more toxins than a store-bought sweet potato puree.

Since they do have stunning health advantages, these foods shouldn't be excluded from the diet entirely.

Make sure your child gets the appropriate amounts through a balanced diet.

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Sources:

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