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WVU Researches Find Link Between PFCs and Early Menopause

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The study examined nearly 70,000 people in Parkersburg

By Stacy Moniot

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MORGANTOWN -- Researchers at West Virginia University say they've found a link between a toxin many of us are exposed to every day and health problems like early menopause and high cholesterol.

Perfluorocarbons, or PFCs, are in a lot of places, from microwave popcorn to food containers even your clothes that are stain-resistant or flame-resistant, but researchers found that women with very high exposure could find themselves in menopause earlier than they expected.

"PFCs can be in all kinds of products," said Dr. Alan Ducatman, M.D., "and because they're in all kinds of household products, we can get them in us and it's very clear that almost all Americans have many of these things in us."

Dr. Ducatman is part of a research team in the Department of Community Medicine that studied almost 70,000 people near Parkersburg where a certain kind of PFC contaminated the water. Chemical manufacturer DuPont was found responsible, and paid a large settlement to the community in 2005.

"The settlement was really good, in terms of public health," Ducatman said, "because it gave a lot of money in the settlement to finding out if there were in fact any measurable outcomes in the exposed populations."

What they found was women between 18 and 65 years old who had high levels of PFC in their bloodstream were more likely to report early onset menopause or low estrogen levels. Ducatman said exposure can affect men as well as women.

"Everyone who's looked at PFCs in a large population has found a link to higher cholesterol, and we did too," he said. "And it's a nontrivial link. Is it causal? We don't have any other explanation at this time but none of the studies have sufficient design yet to prove that it's causal."

Ducatman hopes researchers will look at the link more closely, whether it's his team at WVU or other doctors and researchers across the country.


He suggests avoiding items with PFC, like teflon cooking pans or stain-resistant carpeting to be safe, and said the EPA is requiring manufacturers to phase out PFC's altogether by 2015.

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