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March 28, 2011

The Big M: The Future in Plastics



Christina Boufis

It's impossible to escape the thousands of manmade chemicals in our environment, the vast majority of which are not regulated – nor are their health risks known. So it might not come as that much of a surprise to find that researchers at the West Virginia University School of Medicine have found [women who have higher levels of PFCs \(perfluorocarbons\) have increased odds of early menopause and lower levels of estrogen.](#)

PFCs are stain, water, and grease resistant chemicals that are found in many consumer products – from nonstick pans and fast [food](#) containers to stain resistant carpeting and flame retardant clothing. They leach into the groundwater. They have a long shelf life. In other words, they're ubiquitous. And the health risks of these chemicals in the body? Well, the jury's still out. Almost everyone alive has been exposed, and everyone has PFCs in their blood, but the long term effects are not very well understood. [Studies in mice](#) show potential damage to organs and the immune system, as well as reproductive disorders when exposed to high levels. And certainly, the study of 26,000 women coming out in The Journal of Clinical Endocrinology and Metabolism points in the direction of some kind of reproductive or hormonal effect in women.

["There is no doubt that there is an association between exposure to PFCs and onset of menopause,"](#) said lead researcher, Sarah Knox, PhD, "but the causality is unclear." How much earlier does menopause come for those who have high levels of PFCs in their blood? I couldn't find that statistic, only that early menopause was found in women over 42.

If you're one to worry about things like chemicals in the air we breathe, food we [eat](#), and clothes we wear (as I am), then the news is alarming. But looked at another way, if you're near the average age for menopause – 50 or 51 – and going through a menopause transition or haven't reached it then maybe you haven't been as exposed to PFCs? One can only hope.

Posted by WomansDay.com Editors at 11:00:00 AM in [The Big M](#)

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