

Dr. Michele Marcus • Household Chemical Exposures



Michele Marcus has over 20 years experience as a reproductive and environmental epidemiologist. At Mount Sinai School of Medicine, she was the Director of the Environmental Epidemiology Core of the NIEHS Environmental Health Sciences Center. As a Turner Foundation Fellow at the CDC she coordinated the work of Endocrine Disrupters Leadership Panel.

She has served on federal expert panels reviewing the health effects of exposure to electromagnetic fields, bisphenol A, phthalates, gene/environment interactions and service in the Persian Gulf War. She is currently studying the long-term effects of exposure to brominated flame-retardants as the result of an industrial accident in Michigan.

Discussion Notes

In the United States, chemicals are introduced and included in products without testing. As a result, we are exposed to toxins in our own homes. Only when a scientist can demonstrate the link between a chemical and a health effect (multiple times), does regulation become a consideration. We need to have scientists show that chemicals are bad rather than the government proving that they are safe.

We ingest chemicals even when they are not directly added to food. Nonstick cookware contains Teflon, which is linked with obesity. The surfaces of cardboard take-out boxes (e.g. pizza boxes) contain chemicals to prevent substances like cheese from sticking to the box. While plastics are not meant to be eaten, they contain certain components that will leach into food when heated. If you can smell the chemicals, you are inhaling them. Even when we identify toxic chemicals like BPA, another untested chemical can be substituted, and it isn't necessarily any better for you. Avoid plastic containers with 6 or 7 on the bottom and ones that hold carbonated liquids or acidic substances that encourage leaching.

Babies and children are especially susceptible to chemical exposure because they are still in their critical stages of development. Take extra care in minimizing their exposures.

TAKE-HOME POINTS

Limit use of pesticides. Traps are better than sprays but keep children away from traps.

Use tempered glass, stainless steel or iron for cooking. Avoid using non-stick cookware.

Use tempered glass to heat in the microwave. Avoid heating food in plastic or cardboard. Wash plastic food containers with mild soap & water rather than placing in dishwasher.

Don't buy antibacterial soap or toothpaste with triclosan; use regular soap & water when available rather than hand sanitizers.