Chemicals in Personal Care Products Linked to Early Death

Pthalates in personal care products are associated with premature death from all causes.

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Each day, people use hundreds of consumer products that contain a common class of chemicals called phthalates. These include personal care products such as shampoo, makeup and perfume. Now study findings published in the journal Environmental Pollution show that phthalates are linked to premature death from all causes, particularly to death from heart disease, reports Insider.com.

Manufacturers use phthalates to make fragrances last longer as well as to make plastics more durable. The chemicals may also be found in vinyl flooring, garden hoses, lubricating oils, wall coverings, detergents, pharmaceuticals and blood bags.

For the study, researchers at NYU Langone's Grossman School of Medicine assessed urine samples collected from over 5,303 adults between ages 55 and 64 who participated in the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey 2001 to 2010.

Scientists noted that individuals with the most elevated levels of phthalate metabolites—breakdown by-products—in their urine were more likely to experience premature death, particularly related to cardiovascular problems.

"These chemicals have a rap sheet," Leonardo Trasande, MD, an NYU medical school professor of pediatrics, environmental medicine and population health and the lead study author, told CNN. "And the fact of the matter is that when you look at the entire body of evidence, it provides a haunting pattern of concern."

The findings add to a hefty body of evidence that shows phthalates can disrupt hormone function. No matter how slight the interference to hormones, such as those governing reproduction, physical development and brain and immune system function, these disturbances can cause major problems, according to the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences.

Prior studies have definitively connected people's exposure to phthalates to chronic illnesses, including obesity, diabetes and heart disease.

Study calculations linked the deaths of between 91,000 and 107,000 adults in the United States to phthalates at a cost to American economic productivity of between $40 billion and $47 billion.

“This study adds to the growing database on the impact of plastics on the human body and bolsters public health and business cases for reducing or eliminating the use of plastics,” stressed Trasande.

To learn more about the health effects of phthalates, read “Ordinary Household Goods Linked to Depressed Thyroid in Young Girls.”

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