Fast Food Prep Could Be Causing Major Hormonal Health Risks

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By now, it's well known that fast food is horrible for health. Now, new findings published in the journal Environmental Health Perspectives show that eating foods such as burgers, fries and fried chicken may also seriously disrupt our hormonal health, Time reports.

What's the culprit behind hormone disruption? Chemicals called phthalates, commonly used to make plastic more flexible, that are already linked to a wide variety of health burdens, including lower sperm counts. Turns out, people who eat more fast food have higher levels of two substances in their bloodstream that occur when phthalates break down in the body.

For the study, researchers at George Washington University reviewed data and urine samples from almost 9,000 people who participated in a survey that detailed all the food they ate during a previous 24-hour period. Researchers found that people who got 35 percent or more of their total calories from fast food showed between 24 and 40 percent higher levels of two phthalate by-products, DEHP and DiNP, than people who didn't eat these unhealthy meals.

Researchers said the reason for the uptick in these dangerous chemicals could be that phthalates that are leeching onto fast food during preparation or packaging. Scientists also noted that plastic gloves and food conveyor belts may be to blame. What's more, the high temperatures used to cook fast foods and the heat lamps employed to keep meals warm may also make it easier for the chemicals to seep into food.

"Our study helps shed light on one potential way that people can reduce their exposure to chemicals through their diet, but it also points to a broader problem of widespread chemicals in our food systems that will require many different types of stakeholders to get involved in order to fix it," said Ami Zota, PhD, assistant professor of environmental and occupational health at the George Washington University Milken Institute School of Public Health, a study author.

Ready to cut fast food from your diet? Click here for some recipes that will help you get rid of the

fat, sugar, salt and dangerous chemical byproducts in these quickie meals, without sacrificing flavor.

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