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43 US cities have contaminateded water. Here's how to protect yourself
By Tracey Anne Duncan | January 28 2020



Last week, the Environmental Working Group released a report showing that, in 43 out of 44 cities tested, the drinking water was contaminated. The problem is PFAS, a.k.a. “forever chemicals,” a.k.a. per and polyfluoroalkyl substances. These substances get into the water as a result of the production of chemicals that are used to make many common products, including Teflon and dental floss. They’re called “forever chemicals” because they stay in your body basically forever.

NBD, right? Who’s panicking? A few of us, I imagine. But before you switch full time from H2O to whiskey, here’s what doctors and chemists want you to know.

PFAS have been around for years

“The study conducted and reported by EWG is certainly another concerning piece of evidence that our environment, including our water supply, is overall becoming more toxic with time,” says **Elroy Vojdani, a Los Angeles-based functional medicine practitioner** whose focus is autoimmune, neurodegenerative, and autoinflammatory conditions.

This is not new information, though. “While this study certainly is a wake-up call to the public, PFAS contamination and toxicity is a problem that scientists have known about for years,” adds



Eric Roy, a DC-based chemist who creates water filters specific to geographic areas, which he began doing in the wake of the Flint, Michigan water disaster.

Scientists are still learning about the effects that PFAS can have on the human body. There is some evidence that they can lead to negative health outcomes, such as low birth weights and increased risk of cancer. But Vojdani says that we don't necessarily need to freak out. "Though consuming PFAS and other common toxic contaminants in our drinking water is by no means a good thing, I think in reality that on their own this exposure is very unlikely to *cause* any disease," he says. "Ingestion or exposure to toxic chemicals like PFAS is inevitable."

Invest in filters that will remove PFAS, but be aware of scams

"The problem is that PFAS is a giant class of chemicals, and most filter companies only test against the easiest ones to filter (PFOS & PFOA)," explains Roy. "There are no real 'industry standard' protocols to test against the other PFAS, and some filter companies use this to their advantage and make really misleading claims based on selective testing — for example, only testing at the start of the filter lifetime when it's fresh." Roy suggests investing in a high-quality water filter that uses third party test data under real world conditions to prove that they remove PFAS. Some filters that meet this high standard are Hydroviv, Culligan, and APEC.

Limit your exposure to other chemical toxins and boost your body's ability to deal with them

You may not be able to avoid exposure to PFAS completely, Vojdani says, but by limiting your exposure to other toxic chemicals, you will reduce the number of toxins that your body must process. This means moderating your use of plastic containers. "Reduce your consumption of items that have been stored for long periods of time in plastic containers and under no circumstances should you ever microwave something stored in plastic," he says. "This will greatly reduce your exposure to phthalates and BPA substitutes which have toxic effects."

Vojdani tells me that the human body is quite robust in its ability to handle toxins as long as you give it the tools it needs to dispose of them and that the overall exposure to chemicals is limited. "Give your body plenty of what it needs — plenty of organic greens like broccoli, spinach, kale, swiss chard, celery, and cilantro," he says "And make sure that you consume a healthy amount of fiber. I like using things like chia seeds, flax seeds, or psyllium husk."

"Demand that your elected officials make water quality data transparent, interpretable, and accessible."



If you do what you can to strengthen your body and play defense, then you're giving yourself every opportunity to appropriately handle exposure to PFAS, as well as all of the other toxins that come along with living in today's world, Vojdani says.

Demand that your elected officials protect the water you drink

"This is a call-to-action for all of us to be mindful that on average our everyday world is more toxic today than it was 50 or 60 years ago and that we have to consider this as one of the many contributors to the rise in chronic conditions we are seeing in our country," says Vojdani. On an individual level, that means eating greens, reducing your use of plastics, and filtering your water. On a global level, that means telling the powers that be to do their jobs. "Demand that your elected officials make water quality data transparent, interpretable, and accessible," says Roy.

You can find information about your drinking water from the EPA and you can sign up to get action alerts from Clean Water Action about timely issues.

<https://www.mic.com/p/43-us-cities-have-contaminated-water-heres-how-to-protect-yourself-21752451>