

Living well: Optimizing your nutrition & detoxifying your kitchen
Session I: Cookware

Olga Naidenko, PhD (00:00):

So let's talk a little bit about cookware. What do we see on the photo? It looks suspiciously like a pan, sort of a brand name warning. A brand that used to be called Teflon. In fact, lots of these pans, which look like this, are in the marketplace. There is a lot of variety, and Teflon is just one brand. And the reason that really for the last 15-plus years, so much focus came toward the cookware in particular, is basically their non-stick surfaces. I think they became kind of common in kitchens in the United States, maybe in the '70s or '80s. I was not here at this time, so I don't know when the first Teflon pans and similar products arrived in American kitchens, but they were very popular for a while.

Olga Naidenko, PhD (00:55):

We all know that. So that said, previous generations would throw away good solid cast iron pans to buy this kind of nonstick cookware. And then what researchers started discovering in the, so in like early 2000s — 2001, 2005, in that time period — is that this type of cookware, if overheated, an experience that happens in the kitchen all the time, basically volatilizes — it basically gets off the surface of the pan into the air. For anybody who already has a respiratory problem this can have very severe respiratory impact. And then as research went on, we have discovered that the type of chemicals that went into making of Teflon and many, many similar products — so it's really not just the cookware pans —

Olga Naidenko, PhD (01:52):

So those kind of chemicals with a long chemical name, perfluorinated chemicals — Now they're called PFAS, yes, they are nonstick, and they repel water, and they repel fast. What's not to like? But it turns out that they really harm our body when they end up in the body, when even in a small quantity. Those PFAS chemicals are now found everywhere. Not good news, because they also have been associated with elevated risk of cancer. So then people would say, immediate, next question, I have five beautiful pans, which are basically those types of pans with a nonstick cover. Should I throw them all away? In fact, the advice is they're probably OK to continue using for the pan's natural life cycle. When the opportunity to replace cookware presents itself, EWG recommends stainless steel. EWG recommends cast iron cause many people like enamel coating.

Olga Naidenko, PhD (02:54):

It depends, but it is not so easy to fry an egg in an enamel-coated pan. That's just a dose of realism there. And another dose of realism is that any kind of cooking — home cooking, cooking fresh meals for the family for oneself, a meal for one is great — is probably better than that reheatable microwave frozen Indian. In fact, not probably, but it is for sure, better. And so, yes, cookware matters when one has the funds, when one has the time to go choose new cookware, one can find those stainless steel or other types of options. There are now also ceramic pans, which is a type of nonstick pan that is different. It does not use those Teflon chemicals. Many people like them. I personally have not used ceramic pans, but I do know that many people are big fans. I'm looking forward to Q&A, so I'll pause here for discussion. I'd love to hear what people use and also specific questions. So, moderators, I will briefly stop sharing and let's see, what have you got in the chat and in the Q&A? What questions are you getting about cookware?

Jean Sachs, LBBC (04:03):

Thank you. Just so I'm clear, because I'm taking notes. It sounds like you're saying stainless steel or cast iron or ceramic is the best choice, but if you have Teflon pans, which many of us have, I mean, you don't buy that many pans in your lifetime, I think you were saying Environmental Working Group says it's OK to continue to use it. But when you're ready, to replace it. But a question I have is: What if it's chipped? Is that the indication that it's now time to get a new pan.

Olga Naidenko, PhD (04:42):

Yeah. Great question. It tends to be black-colored surface. If it's chipped, that does mean that the small particles or that coating that contains an atom called fluorine —that's why we call it fluorinated. The small, small fragments of that will get into our body. Good news, bad news. Good news: it will get in our body, and it will probably get excreted. Bad news: you probably don't want to be swallowing that stuff. It's not poisonous. So it's not: Oh, my pan is chipped. I need to call Poison Control. So, I would say that, again, it's not an acute consideration, but frankly, if the pan is chipped, I would go look for a new one if people have the economic opportunity to do so. Again, we have been really realistic, especially in the last two years. Replacing the full set of cookware was just really not an option for many people, and cooking is better than not cooking. But if it is economically possible, then I would replace the chipped pan. Not because it's an acute concern, but because it's a chance to go buy something better as far as health and cooking.

Jean Sachs, LBBC (05:48):

Right. And I think for many of us during the pandemic, we really got to know our cookware pretty well. At least I cooked a lot more meals at home. So, I certainly was more aware of sort of the condition of my pans. Lynn, do you have a question?

Lynn Folkman, LBBC (06:03):

Yeah. I know you had touched upon — thanks, first of all, Jean for recapping the couple of questions. I know you mentioned ceramic pans, but can you talk a little bit more about that? Is it, is that acceptable too, or does it depend on the type of ceramic pan?

Olga Naidenko, PhD (06:21):

Ceramic pans are interesting because they are indeed a new entry or a new arrival into the cookware scene. They actually seem not bad. So for those pans again — it's not just Teflon, there are many, many brands, just Teflon chemicals is how those types of surfaces became to be known. They literally overheated. Those types of coating, they volatilized, and they go into the air as small particles. And so that's very bad for the respiratory system, and it's silicone coating. And of course, silica is what sand is made of, and it does not have this problem. But, and I actually just saw it in the chat, I think somebody put it in, we don't want to be overheating anything in the kitchen. I will admit I have overheated pans — not a Teflon one pan, I don't own one; I own cast iron — but it happens.

Olga Naidenko, PhD (07:16):

And so still kind of, just to share my own thing, I started setting up a timer on my cell phone, lest I walk away. I turned the pan on in, in 30 seconds a timer on my phone showed green. So coming up with life hacks that work for one. I still avoiding overheating and avoid smoking. If there's a something going on — a small baby, a child, the dog — it is very easy to get

distracted, but for any pan, a silicone-coated pan, cast iron, stainless steel, avoiding overheating and smoke in the kitchen is still really good for everybody.

Jean Sachs, LBBC (07:55):

Got it. OK. And so what about using aluminum foil pans? I think a lot of times on the holidays we'll get those pans made out of aluminum foil. Is that OK? And then also, what about utensils you use for cooking? Because many of those are coated as well.

Olga Naidenko, PhD (08:18):

Absolutely. Great question. So, indeed, aluminum has been raising questions for a long time, because there have been concerns based on, I would say studies that deserve consideration. That's how I would describe it about potentially whether aluminum could migrate into the food, into the body. There has been a concern about, for example, aluminum in Jordan also used in the body, and the concern that aluminum, if ingested and large quantities, can have neurotoxic effects. I have not seen studies which have linked aluminum cookware pans, which are used for a relatively short period of time. Usually, not always, but very often it's a single use for a large social event. I have not seen studies which have raised concerns about that type of aluminum cookware. Once upon a time before COVID we all had potlucks for 20. So I have not seen concerns raised about that. And I also go back the fact that the communal sharing of the food is such a psychologically positive experience for all people, whether they have had cancer or not. So, I'm a fan of cooking!

Olga Naidenko, PhD (09:38):

As for cookware and service containers. I can say, stainless steel and water, great. Now we see a lot of silicone serving spoons. I have not seen concerns about them very often. There's so much great innovation happening in the consumer product market. That is a good thing. The not-so-good thing is that very often that innovation is ahead of government agencies' ability to assess the safety of the products, which have just now been introduced on the market. So, I consider time, a friend of stainless steel serving spoons because, well, they have been with us humans for a long time and nobody per se says that they're negative. I am not a fan of plastic serving containers, same as many scientists do very much recommend avoiding reheating food and and microwaving it in a plastic container. Reheating food is a reality for all of us, people who work for a living, but it's best to reheat in glass, if possible, or on a ceramic plate, not in a plastic container, even if that was the storage container. And that is why we recommend against plastic utensils, because what happens is that basically small molecules from that plastic container or the serving utensils can and will migrate into the food. So, I would avoid this, if possible. Again, if it's not possible to avoid, I would recommend avoiding reheating in plastic, or contact of heat with plastic malleable materials.

Jean Sachs, LBBC (11:09):

Lynn, you have a question?

Lynn Folkman, LBBC (11:10):

Thank you. Well, I know we have so much to get through in the program, so I was going to move on to the next segment. There are a lot of great questions, but I want to make sure we cover everything. B

Jean Sachs, LBBC (11:23):

But let's ask this one question. I love that Lynn's the timekeeper, because I think this might be popular, but I think that everyone wants you to clarify: Is enamel cast iron OK? Like the very popular Le Creuset pans that many people have?

Olga Naidenko, PhD (11:42):

I have not seen any studies which have raised concerns about pans — specifically that enamel cast iron, of course, very fashionable in high-profile kitchens. I have not seen any concern, any studies which said that it is a problem, unlike the Teflon, that fluorine substance coating, for which there are many studies. And in this case, absence of bad news is good news.

Jean Sachs, LBBC (12:10):

Great. And then because I know I've done this. If we are going to store food in plastic, which probably we shouldn't do, we should not be putting our plastic in the dishwasher, right?

Olga Naidenko, PhD (12:23):

That's a great question. It sort of depends because again, there is a reality. Does one have time to wash everything by hand. Based on the actually fairly extensive research about how various types of plasticizers and basically plastic additives do migrate from the plastic container into food, the researchers have started to recommend looking for other containers. Glass has become popular, but many parents know having a lot of glass containers around small children can be tricky. So again, sometimes plastic for storage is just the dose of realism that it is a more practical option. However, even if one uses that for storage, it's really best not to microwave. It's best to transfer from perhaps a plastic containers that was in the refrigerator into a ceramic bowl, into a glass container, and then go into the microwave.

Jean Sachs, LBBC (13:15):

OK. I think we got that. I think it's OK to eat on plastic, but don't, don't heat up your food if you have to store it in the refrigerator. That's OK. But if you can avoid it, glass or ceramic is better.