If there's one meal guaranteed to meet the needs of picky toddlers, harried parents, and broke college students alike, it's mac-n-cheese. Whether you prefer the classic stuff in the blue box or the organic brand famous for its pasta bunnies, you probably realize that mac-n-cheese isn't healthy, exactly. But given the fast food alternatives, we tell ourselves, it's isn't that bad. And yet, because everything we love is secretly conspiring to kill us, a recent report suggests that each serving of America's favorite processed cheese food also serves up a hefty dose of phthalates, a class of chemicals increasingly thought to interfere with the body's hormones. But does this mean that you should give up eating that orange goo?

Phthalates, which includes chemicals such as di(2-ethylhexyl) phthalate (DEHP) and Diethyl phthalate (DEP), help make rigid plastics more flexible and less breakable. In cosmetics, phthalates help chemical components better bind to each other. Unfortunately, a growing body of research links them to genital birth defects, the disruption of some hormones, learning disabilities, and behavioral problems.

Thanks to a 2008 bill, phthalates are now banned in the production of children’s products (like toys). But they're still abundant. You’ll find phthalates in vinyl flooring, aftershave, nail polish, and increasingly in food, although their presence there isn’t completely understood. It’s thought that some foods packaged in materials containing phthalates (including cellophane, paperboard, and plastics) pick the chemicals up as they sit on your shelves. Tasty.

Before delving into the mac-n-cheese report that is currently making the rounds, it's important to note that unless you're raising cows yourself with a feed you're making yourself (and hand-milking said cow into glass containers), almost all dairy products you consume contain phthalates. In fact, you might do all of the aforementioned dairy farming and still find that your milk contains the chemicals. A 2013 study in the journal Environment International tracked the progression of eight

different phthalates through the food chain and determined that basically every step of the milk production process helps introduce phthalates into the end result.