

Just how much these daily activities contribute to your exposure is really hard to tell, which is why EPA estimates have found that everyone from infants to adolescents routinely bypass their recommended threshold. How can we not, given that phthalates have been found in spices, seafood, fruit juice, and beer? The mac-n-cheese report did not test for the presence of phthalates in the macaroni, but it's likely that they too would have tested positive—phthalates have been found in bread and cereal products as well. Even if you buy products in glass jars, you're likely getting exposed when you consume them: one study found that glass jars of olives and peanut butter contain phthalates—they migrate from the little plastic gaskets that keep those jars sealed.

The big takeaway? It's easy to obsess over the things we feel we can control. You can always choose to cut mac-n-cheese out of your child's diet, and that decision may make you feel like you're protecting them from toxic chemical exposure. It's the same reason we rejoice over studies that seem to say coffee helps us live longer or that chili peppers are the latest superfood—we want to believe that we can make choices that are good for us. But the truth is that our food system—and other industries—make it basically impossible to avoid the chemicals used to malign your toddler's favorite food. So the unsatisfying conclusion, as always, is this: you should probably enjoy everything in moderation.