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# Cooking utensils and nutrition

Cooking utensils can have an effect on your nutrition.

## Function

Pots, pans, and other tools used in cooking often do more than just hold the food. The material that they are made from can leach into the food that is being cooked.

Common materials used in cookware and utensils are:

- Aluminum
- Copper
- Iron
- Lead
- Stainless steel
- Teflon (polytetrafluoroethylene)

Both lead and copper have been linked to illness. The FDA imposed limits on the amount of lead in dishware, but ceramic items made in other countries or considered to be a craft, antique, or collectable may exceed the recommended amount. The FDA also warns against using unlined copper cookware since the metal can easily leach into acidic foods, causing copper toxicity.

## Food Sources

Cookware and cooking utensils can affect any cooked foods.

## Recommendations

Choose metal cookware and bakeware that can be easily cleaned. There should be no cracks or rough edges that can trap or hold food or bacteria.

Avoid using metal or hard plastic utensils on cookware. These utensils can scratch surfaces and cause pots and pans to wear out faster. Use wood, bamboo or silicone instead. Never use cookware if the coating has started to peel or wear away.

**Aluminum**

Aluminum cookware is very popular. Nonstick, scratch-resistant anodized aluminum cookware is a good choice. The hard surface is easy to clean. It is sealed so aluminum cannot get into food.

There have been concerns in the past that aluminum cookware increases the risk for Alzheimer disease. The Alzheimer's Association reports that using aluminum cookware is not a major risk for the disease.

Uncoated aluminum cookware is a greater risk. This type of cookware can easily melt. It can cause burns if it gets too hot. Still, research has shown that the amount of aluminum this cookware leaches into food is very small.

**Lead**

Children should be protected from ceramic cookware containing lead.

- Acidic foods such as oranges, tomatoes, or foods containing vinegar will cause more lead to be leached from ceramic cookware than non-acidic foods like milk.
- More lead will leach into hot liquids like coffee, tea, and soups than into cold beverages.
- DO NOT use any dishware that has a dusty or chalky gray film on the glaze after it has been washed.

Some ceramic cookware should not be used to hold food. This includes items bought in another country or considered to be a craft, antique, or collectable. These pieces may not meet FDA specifications. Test kits can detect high levels of lead in ceramic cookware, but lower levels may also be dangerous.

**Iron**

Iron cookware may be a good choice. Cooking in cast iron pots may increase the amount of iron in the diet. Most of the time, this is a very small source of dietary iron.

**Teflon**

Teflon is a brand name for a nonstick coating found on certain pots and pans. It contains a substance called polytetrafluoroethylene.

The nonstick types of these pans should be used only at low or medium heat. They should never be left unattended at high heat. This may cause the release of fumes that can irritate humans and household pets. When left unattended on the stove, empty cookware can get very hot within just a few minutes.

There have been concerns about a possible link between Teflon and perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA), a man-made chemical. The Environmental Protection Agency states that Teflon does not contain PFOA so the cookware poses no danger.

**Copper**

Copper pots are popular due to their even heating. But large amounts of copper from unlined cookware can cause nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea.

Some copper and brass pans are coated with another metal to prevent food from coming into contact with copper. Over time, these coatings can break down and allow copper to dissolve in food. Older copper cookware may have tin or nickel coatings and should not be used for cooking.

**Stainless Steel**

Stainless steel cookware is low in cost and can be used at high heat. It has a sturdy cookware surface that does not wear down easily. Most stainless steel cookware has copper or aluminum bottoms for even heating. Health problems from stainless steel are rare.

**Cutting Boards**

Choose a surface such as plastic, marble, glass, or pyroceramic. These materials are easier to clean than wood.

Avoid contaminating vegetables with meat bacteria. Use one cutting board for fresh produce and bread. Use a separate one for raw meat, poultry, and seafood. This will prevent bacteria on a cutting board from getting into the food that will not be cooked.

Cleaning cutting boards:

- Wash all cutting boards with hot, soapy water after each use.
- Rinse with clear water and air dry or pat dry with clean paper towels.
- Acrylic, plastic, glass, and solid wood boards can be washed in a dishwasher (laminated boards may crack and split).

Sanitizing cutting boards:

- Use a solution of 1 tablespoon (15 milliliters) of unscented, liquid chlorine bleach per gallon (3.8 liters) of water for both wood and plastic cutting boards.
- Flood the surface with the bleach solution and allow it to stand for several minutes.
- Rinse with clear water and air dry or pat dry with clean paper towels.

Replacing cutting boards:

- Plastic and wooden cutting boards wear out over time.
- Throw out cutting boards that are very worn or have deep grooves.

**Kitchen Sponges**

Kitchen sponges can grow harmful bacteria, yeasts, and molds.

The United States Department of Agriculture says that the best ways to kill germs on a kitchen sponge are:

- Microwave the sponge on high for one minute, which kills up to 99% of germs.
- Clean it in the dishwasher, using both wash and dry cycles and a water temperature of 140°F (60°C) or higher.

Soap and water or bleach and water do not work as well for killing germs on sponges. Another option is to buy a new sponge each week.

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