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THE COST OF ENDOCRINE DISRUPTING CHEMICALS IN THE ENVIRONMENT

DETOX

Research appearing in *The Lancet* (17 October 2016 http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S2213-8587(16)30275-3) Looked at Endocrine-disrupting chemicals (EDCs) and their link to disease and the possible contribution to an increase in medical costs (>1% of the gross domestic product [GDP] in the European Union). Because EDC exposure varies between the United States and Europe, due to a difference in regulations. The authors used this difference to quantify disease burdens and costs related to EDC exposure.

EDC exposure in the USA contributes to disease and dysfunction, with annual costs taking up more than 2% of the GDP ($340 billion, or 2.33% of GDP). In Europe, the cost is lower ($217 billion, or 1.28% of the GDP) Differences from the European Union suggest the need for improved screening for chemical disruption to endocrine systems and proactive prevention.

The disease costs of EDCs were much higher in the USA than in Europe ($340 billion [2·33% of GDP] *vs* $217 billion [1·28%]). In the United States, there is a greater exposure to Polybrominated diphenyl ethers or PBDEs. These are organobromine compounds that are used as flame retardants. PBDEs have been used in a wide array of products, including building materials, electronics, furnishings, motor vehicles, airplanes, plastics, polyurethane foams, and textiles. They are structurally akin to the PCBs and other polyhalogenated compounds. The United States had a greater loss of intelligence quotient (IQ) points loss and intellectual disability due to PBDEs (11 million IQ points lost and 43,000 cases costing $266 billion in the USA *vs* 873,000 IQ points lost and 3,290 cases costing $12·6 billion in the European Union).

In the European Union, organophosphate pesticides were the largest contributor to costs associated with EDC exposure ($121 billion), whereas in the USA costs due to pesticides were much lower ($42 billion).

IS VIOLENT BEHAVIOR LINKED TO TOXINS?

Research appearing in the *Journal of Neuropsychiatry* (1992;4:189-94) linked chemical and pesticide exposure to violent behavior. Researchers at the New York University School of Medicine note that environmental exposure to cholinesterase inhibitors can produce aggressive and violent behavior. Serum or red blood cell count cholinesterase levels can be assessed in patients with idiopathic aggression. Four patients, who were exposed to cholinesterase inhibitors, were noted to become uncharacteristically aggressive. Two of these individuals committed murder. Three of the four had come in contact with an organophosphate lawn pesticide while the fourth had used a carbamate based tick powder, after which the individual began displaying abnormally aggressive and violent behavior. None of these patients had psychiatric or neurologic diagnoses prior to exposure to cholinesterase inhibitors. All had jobs. None had ever been arrested or were prone to fighting or impulsive behavior. All the individuals felt very remorseful after their violent acts. Little or no provocation proceeded the acts. All 4 of the patients returned to normal following the termination of exposure to the cholinesterase inhibitor and none committed further violent or aggressive acts.

Toxins Lower Testosterone Levels

Research appearing in *The Journal of Clinical Endocrinology & Metabolism* (Vol. 92, No. 1 196-202) observed declining levels of testosterone that do not seem to be attributed to health or lifestyle and the authors concluded that, "These results indicate that recent years have seen a substantial, and as yet unrecognized, age-independent population-level decrease in testosterone in American men, potentially attributable to birth cohort differences or to health or environmental effects not captured in observed data." One possible explanation of the lower testosterone levels is chemicals in the environment. Studies have found environmental impacts on testosterone levels. For example, testosterone levels were lower in US Air Force veterans exposed to dioxins (*Environmental Health Perspectives,* Nov. 2006, vol. 114, #11). Testosterone levels were also lower in men exposed to phthalates at work (Environmental Health Perspectives, Nov. 2006, vol. 114, #11). Exposure to BPA (biphenol A) is linked to prostate cancer.

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OUR DECLINING WATER QUALITY

Toxic runoff from agriculture, industry and suburban lawns is making drinking water unsafe, destroying the fishing industry, and creating mutant fish and animals. The Clean Water Act, passed in 1972, but, according to the New York Times, in the last five years alone, chemical factories, manufacturing plants and other workplaces have violated water pollution laws more than half a million times. The violations range from failing to report emissions to dumping toxins at concentrations regulators say might contribute to cancer, birth defects and other illnesses.

A recent U.S. Geological Survey (USGS.gov) study found an alarming rate of white sucker fish with prominent tumors in several of Wisconsin's Lake Michigan tributaries. The three-year study looked at White Sucker tumor prevalence in the Sheboygan River and Milwaukee Estuary, which have both been listed as "Areas of Concern (AOC)" under the International Joint Commission Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement between the United States and Canada. "There was an elevated prevalence of skin and liver tumors on fish from both Areas of Concern as well as one of the non-Areas of Concern," said Vicki Blazer, USGS Research Fish Biologist and lead author of the study. Because white suckers, also called mullet, eat from the sediment on river bottoms, their overall health is considered an indicator of the environmental degradation within an ecosystem.

An estimated 19.5 million Americans fall ill each year from drinking water contaminated with parasites, bacteria or viruses, according to a study published last year in the scientific journal Reviews of Environmental Contamination and Toxicology. That figure does not include illnesses caused by other chemicals and toxins.

The Safe Drinking Water Act only regulates 91 contaminants. The problem is that more than 80,000 chemicals are used in the U.S. How many of these chemicals, and at what levels, end up in the water supply is not known, because no one is testing and measuring these unregulated chemicals in drinking water.

We won't have a society if we destroy the environment.

Margaret Mead

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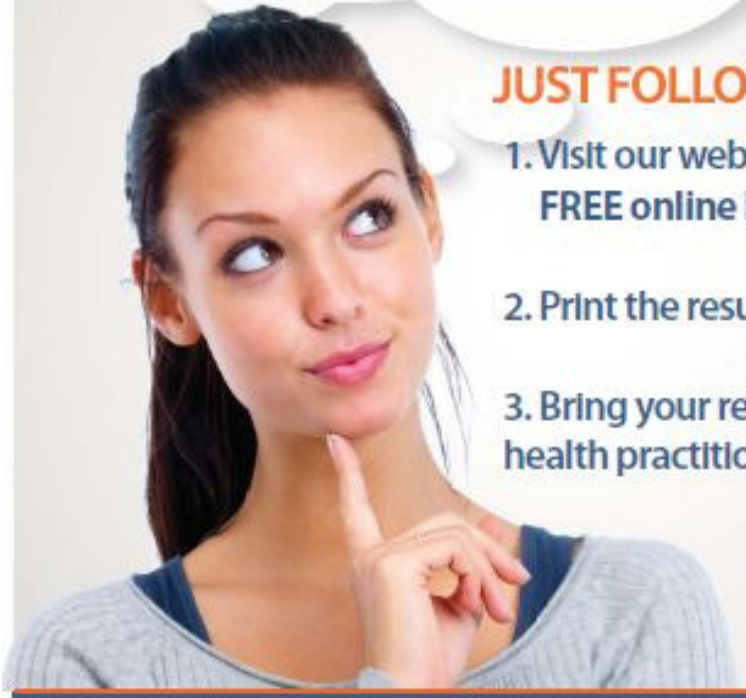

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IS THERE LEAD IN YOUR DRINKING WATER?

Lead can enter drinking water when service pipes that contain lead corrode, especially where the water has high acidity or low mineral content that corrodes pipes and fixtures. The most common problem is with brass or chrome-plated brass faucets and fixtures with lead solder, from which significant amounts of lead can enter into the water, especially hot water.

Homes built before 1986 are more likely to have lead pipes, fixtures and solder. The Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) has reduced the maximum allowable lead content — that is, content that is considered "lead-free" — to be a weighted average of 0.25 percent calculated across the wetted surfaces of pipes, pipe fittings, plumbing fittings, and fixtures and 0.2 percent for solder and flux.

We are all aware of the problem with lead in Flint, Michigan. Lead seepage into the drinking water caused a massive public health crisis and prompted President Obama to declare a federal state of emergency there. The problem began when the city switched its water supply in 2014. Almost immediately, residents of Flint started complaining about the quality of the water. City and state officials denied for months that there was a serious problem.

By that time, supply pipes had sustained major corrosion and lead was leaching into the water. The city switched back to its original water supply late last year, but it was too late to reverse the damage to the pipes.

Flint may not be the only place with a lead problem. More than 18 million Americans receive drinking water from water treatment facilities that have violated federal drinking water rules for lead. And, in 9 out of 10 cases, the EPA has taken no enforcement action against the violators. Many water treatment facilities have also been caught using incorrect testing methods to avoid detecting high levels of lead.