

Fact bite #50



Synthetic antioxidants

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Consumption of antioxidant-rich “superfoods” like blueberries and whole grains has been linked to positive health outcomes. But what about synthetic antioxidants added to food packaging?

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Food
Packaging
Forum

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Synthetic antioxidants

Polymers can degrade when exposed to oxygen, heat, or light. This can cause brittleness, discoloration, cracking, or loss of mechanical strength in polymeric materials like plastics. To prevent this, manufacturers add stabilizers such as synthetic antioxidants to extend a product's lifetime.

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Scientific evidence shows that these compounds can migrate from food contact materials into food. However, while these antioxidants are good for packaging, some are potentially hazards to human health and the environment.

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For example butylated hydroxytoluene (BHT) and 2,4-di-tert-butylphenol (2,4-DtBP) are both suspected endocrine disruptors – meaning they may interact with and disrupt the hormone system.

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Still, very little is known about the toxicity of most synthetic antioxidants and their degradation products, despite their potential to migrate into food. More research will be needed to better understand their risks.

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