

Perchlorate In Your Diet: Are You At Risk?

(NAPSA)—You may soon be hearing a lot about perchlorate—a naturally occurring salt produced in the atmosphere, as well as a man-made industrial by-product—and how much of it is in our food and bodies. At high concentrations, perchlorate can affect how the thyroid gland functions, but its impact at lower concentrations is still the subject of much scientific debate.

Where Is It?

Perchlorate has been found in drinking water across the nation for almost a decade, but a forthcoming study by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) will also characterize the perchlorate found in our diets. Another study by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) will report that perchlorate is also commonly found in people's blood and urine. Since scientists disagree about the possible risks of daily dietary exposure to low levels of perchlorate, there is likely to be a lot of speculation regarding these studies.

The FDA study indicates that trace levels of perchlorate can be found in numerous foods, including some fruit juices, baby foods, milk, fresh fruit and vegetables and some processed foods. The substance is also water soluble and passes readily through the body.

Together, the studies indicate that the American diet results in low levels of perchlorate in our bodies. Do these levels put us at risk? It's too early to tell, though perchlorate damage to the thyroid—specifically, reduction of its ability to absorb iodine—is not commonly found in the U.S. Furthermore, the iodine in our diets—from iodized salt, dairy products, bread and other sources—is considered by many to reduce or eliminate the potential risks posed by perchlorate.

Are You At Risk?

Although some argue that perchlorate is a risk the government



Despite the widespread presence of perchlorate in food, there is no evidence that it's harming anybody.

needs to regulate strictly, many credible scientists say there is no need for concern. Despite decades of perchlorate in the environment and in our diets, there is no clear evidence that it has harmed us. Besides, nutritionists continue to advocate a diet rich in fresh fruits and vegetables, meats, dairy products and whole-grain cereals as the basis of good nutrition, despite the presence of perchlorate.

Where It Comes From

Perchlorate has been described by the media as “rocket fuel” because the Space Shuttle and other military uses include perchlorate as part of their solid propellant fuel. But the substance is also produced naturally in the atmosphere, and falls to the earth in rain or snow, where it accumulates in ocean kelp, mountain glaciers, desert soils and plants, or percolates by rain or irrigation into groundwater. Some of the deposits in arid parts of the world are millions of years old.

Perchlorate is also used by many industries, including companies that make and use industrial operations, and has found its way into the sources of drinking water and irrigation water, such as the Colorado River. This combi-

nation has, not surprisingly, resulted in food and drinking water with traces of perchlorate in them.

Related Natural Inhibitors

We also know that our diets contain vastly higher levels of thiocyanate, nitrate and other naturally occurring substances that can inhibit iodine uptake the same way as perchlorate. Their natural levels in our diets and bodies dwarf those of perchlorate, yet nutritionists have long recommended a healthy diet, despite the presence of thiocyanate and nitrate. So by comparison, the trace levels of perchlorate found in these studies are arguably insignificant next to the levels of other iodine uptake inhibitors naturally found in the diet.

Healthy Approach

It will take additional study to know how high a “safe” level is for perchlorate in the diet. Despite the uncertainty, some states and environmental groups have taken an alarmist position and have insisted that a very low enforceable standard is essential. Studies by the National Academy of Sciences and scientists in several other countries, however, question the usefulness of such policies. It makes little sense to worry about or try to regulate perchlorate before the research is complete. Experts agree that it makes little sense to focus solely on perchlorate before the research is complete, especially when its levels are so much lower than naturally occurring levels of thiocyanate and nitrate in our diets.

Despite the media attention and ongoing political debate, experts advise that perchlorate detections in food and water should not require any change in your diet. Instead, they advocate that we should be realistic about the potential risks posed by all of the various components of our diets and thus become smarter consumers.