

DANGERS OF MICROWAVE POPCORN¹

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When it's movie night and you're getting ready to break out the popcorn, using an air popper or jostling a pot of kernels in a heart-friendly oil on your stove top might be your best choices. A report from the FDA indicates that a chemical coating used in microwave popcorn bags breaks down when heated into a substance called perfluorooctanoic (PFOA). The Environmental Protection Agency has identified PFOA as a "likely carcinogen." Another study has found an acid that can be extracted from the chemical causes cancer in animals and is "likely to cause cancer in humans."

A second potential danger in microwave popcorn is diacetyl, an FDA-approved chemical found in the fake butter flavoring. There's even a debilitating respiratory disease called "popcorn workers lung," (the medical name of the condition is bronchiolitis obliterans) suffered by microwave popcorn factory workers caused by extended inhalation of the chemical's fumes. The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, (NIOSH) concluded that diacetyl needs further study so that workers in the flavorings and snack industry are no longer at risk

The Food and Drug Administration continues to study whether consumers can develop lung disease from inhaling diacetyl. In response to the concerns regarding the risks of diacetyl exposure, a number of microwave popcorn manufacturers have discontinued using it in their products.

Pop Your Own

Here's the way to make popcorn on your stove top: Pour 3 tablespoons of olive oil (or grapeseed oil if you prefer a more neutral taste) into a heavy, 3 quart or larger pan and place on medium high heat. Put two kernels in, and when one has popped, pour in 1/3 cup of pop corn (white or yellow) and cover pan. When corn begins to pop, shake constantly allowing steam to escape from popping kernels—otherwise popcorn will lose its crunch. Remove pan from heat immediately when popping stops or it will burn. Pour into a large bowl and season to taste.

¹ Care2, healthy & green daily, August 29, 2010