

Harmful chemicals

PFCs

Known as perfluoroalkyl chemicals, these have water- and grease-repellent properties and are found in greaseproof paper and cardboard food packaging.

Watch out: These may reduce immunity, birth weight and fertility. Research also shows that PFCs may affect the thyroid system, digestion, muscle control, brain development and bone strength.

Perchlorate

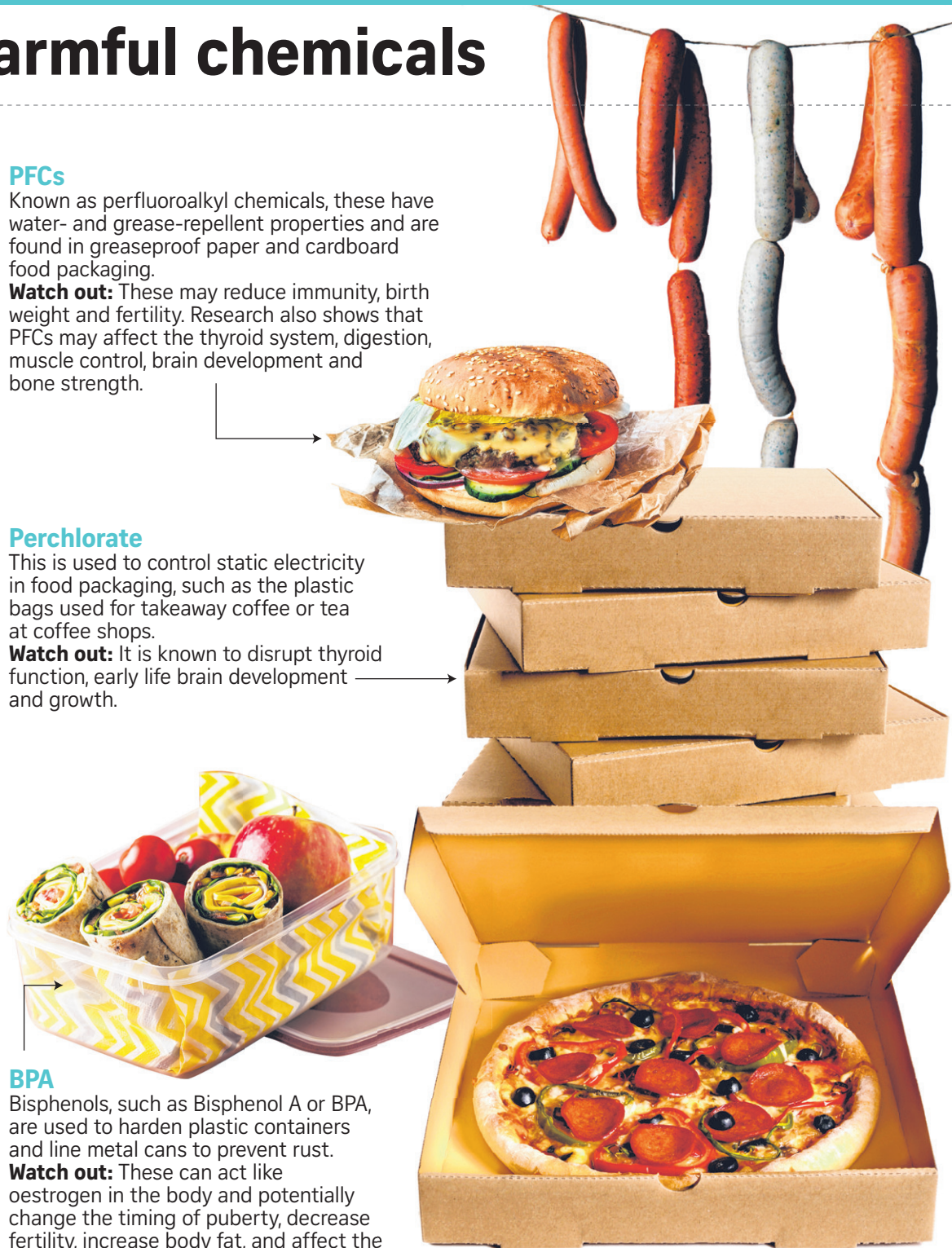
This is used to control static electricity in food packaging, such as the plastic bags used for takeaway coffee or tea at coffee shops.

Watch out: It is known to disrupt thyroid function, early life brain development and growth.

BPA

Bisphenols, such as Bisphenol A or BPA, are used to harden plastic containers and line metal cans to prevent rust.

Watch out: These can act like oestrogen in the body and potentially change the timing of puberty, decrease fertility, increase body fat, and affect the nervous and immune systems.



Nitrates and nitrites

These are used to make food last longer and enhance its colour, particularly processed meats such as sausages and ham.

Watch out: They can interfere with thyroid hormone production and the blood's ability to deliver oxygen in the body. Also, these have been linked with gastrointestinal and nervous system cancers.



Artificial food colours

These are used to improve the appearance of processed foods and are commonly found in children's food products.

Watch out: These can sometimes act as substitutes for nutritious ingredients, such as in fruit juice drinks that contain little or no actual fruit. And they may be associated with worsened attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) symptoms.

Reduce your family's exposure to food additives



Buy fresh or frozen. Buy and serve more fresh or frozen fruits and vegetables, and fewer processed meats, when possible.



Eat fewer processed meats. Try to avoid processed meats, such as hot dogs, ham and meats in pre-packaged meals, especially during pregnancy.



Avoid putting plastic in the microwave. Heat can cause plastics to leak BPA (Bisphenol A) into food. Avoid microwaving food or beverages – including infant formula and breastmilk – in plastic, if possible. It is also a good idea to wash plastic food containers and utensils by hand, rather than putting them in the dishwasher.



Use glass and stainless steel. Especially when cooking or serving hot food, use alternatives to plastic, such as glass or stainless steel, when possible.



Learn plastic recycling codes. Look at the recycling code on the bottom of products to find the plastic type. Try to avoid plastics with recycling codes 3 (phthalates), 6 (styrene), and 7 (bisphenols) unless the plastics are labelled "biobased" or "greenware", which mean they are made from corn and do not contain bisphenols.



Wash your hands. Because chemicals from plastics are so common in items we touch throughout the day, be sure to wash your hands thoroughly before and after handling food, and clean all fruits and vegetables that cannot be peeled.