

Toxic Nation

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:Choosing Healthy Cookware for Your Kitchen!

By Karen McCoy

We love non-stick cookware, don't we? And while most of us think of stainless steel when it comes to non-stick, there are lots of other alternatives out there.

Why do we need alternatives? Because many of us are still using the old stand-by: **Teflon**. But if you haven't heard the news (for the last 10 years), you've either been living under a rock or you're in denial – Teflon kills...small birds that is. So what's it doing in our kitchens?

We have DuPont to thank for the creation of **Teflon** back in the 70's. As with all things, it was a means to make life easier (and make a lot of money). But as the research started flooding in, it was found the cons far out-weighed the pros. Problem is, like a lot of mainstream inventions, you gotta do your own digging to get to the roots of the research. So I dug for you!

What is it anyway? – Non-stick Teflon (and other non-sticky conspirators) consists of **PFC's** (that's short for perfluorinated compounds) and **PFOA's** (specifically perfluorooctanoic acid, Teflon's manufacturing ingredient). PFOA is now at the centre of a \$300 million legal battle.

But wait, it's everywhere! - But it's not just our cookware that's to blame. Other non-stick entities surround us. How's this for starters:

- Gore Tex clothing
- Scotch Guard™ (for rugs, sofas, curtains, clothing, to keep the stains from sticking...currently phasing it out of its products)
- Stain Master™
- Computer mice
- Windshield wipers
- Popcorn bags (it lines the inner bag so the popcorn doesn't stick after microwaving)
- Take-out Pizza boxes (same idea as above)
- Cosmetics



The EPA is well aware of the prevalence of PFCs in our environment, and has shown up in the flesh of ringed seals in the Arctic, polar bears and in the blood of 98% of North Americans. They even sent a notice to *Environment Canada*, advising them of its prevalence and danger. This was brought about by the voluntarily phase-out by 3M (the makers of Scotch Guard) of the use of PFOS when it discovered how persistent it was in the environment. Finally, a good guy in all of this!

The biggest health issues with PFOs and PFOAs are birth defects, developmental problems, high cholesterol and hormone disruption. And because of its incredible durability, fire resistance and slipperiness (the very things that make it extremely useful), it doesn't break down. And nothing can get rid of it. The same molecules that were created 100 years ago will still be here 2 centuries from now. So the toxic load keeps increasing.

Teflon Town

It all started, really, in Parkersburg, West Virginia, and the manufacturing plant of DuPont, the makers of Teflon. And the place of an Erin Brockovich-style legal battle. Directly across from the DuPont chemical factory is the drinking water-well field for the town of Little Hocking, Ohio, across the river, where mysterious things have been occurring for a very long time – local wildlife are dying, minnows disappearing, farm animals dying, and cattle giving birth to serious abnormalities. And people aren't immune either – skyrocketing levels of respiratory ailments and various cancers, due to the alleged poisoning of the resident's main water supply.



A class action suit was filed in 2001. Part of the problem – seems DuPont knew of health risks in its workers due to PFOAs as far back as 1961, when company researchers discovered that rat livers were enlarged when exposed to PFOA, as explained in a DuPont memo, which was never disclosed by DuPont. (A failure on their part, according to the EPA who is entangled in the law suit.) The lawsuit was settled out of court in 2004, and the required health studies should be complete in 2011. What they're looking at – liver and hormone disorders and immune dysfunction. It'll be a long haul. So your Teflon pans, popcorn bags, gore tex clothing and water-repellent solvents, however, still proudly use the slippery PFAs and PFOAs, their trademark 'miracle' ingredients.

Like a Canary in a Coal Mine

I had read about the issues with Teflon years ago, and threw out my fry pans right away. I read well-documented research on *Teflon Toxicosis*, accepted medical terminology, that describes what happens to small birds' respiratory systems who are exposed to the toxic fumes from non-stick pans. It seems that the delicate respiratory system of birds cannot tolerate the fumes from non-stick pans when heated to high temperatures – their lungs hemorrhage, becoming filled with fluid. They literally drown to death - Teflon toxicosis. Killing of birds, however, are not restricted to cooking devices. Irons, space heaters, self-cleaning ovens, heat lamps, carpet glues and new sofas have ruined the lungs of many a pet bird. Years ago, miners sent canaries into coal mines, and if they died, the air was too toxic for the men to enter. Hmmm. Perhaps we should have learned from this story decades ago...

My Story

While staying at a friend's place in Alberta several years ago, the hostess had a budgie called 'Bud'. Bud lived in the living room, but about a week prior to me visiting, they decided Bud needed more company and they moved him into the kitchen. And in with the cooking and frying.

Now I didn't say anything, but I watched with curiosity for about 4 days as that little bird's disposition changed. At first, he went quiet. Then he started falling off his perch. He fell one last time to the bottom of the cage, rolled on his side and started panting. Within about 4 hours, he was dead. I did mention the research to my hosts, but we're all at different places in our lives, and it wasn't really appreciated. I can understand. Not everyone wants to be known as a pet killer.



So you've decided to ditch the Teflon. Good! Now what?

OK. Hopefully I (and the 30 years of research, along with the 2 most powerful environmental lobbying agencies in the world) have convinced you that slippery isn't always better. So what are our alternatives?

Let's take a look at some alternatives I found, that that won't leave poisonous residues in your body, or our precious environment. It was difficult to find info on some of the overseas products. I've gathered prices, but just remember that it is for varying sizes of pots and pans.

Clean, Non-Stick (*non-Teflon*) Cookware to the Rescue!

Product: ScanPan™

What it's made of: A Danish company with lots of cudos from customers. Their cookware is made from Titanium. Sleek, sexy cookware. Caught my eye. More expensive, but worth it in the end.

Retail: Large cooking dish, \$229.

Website: scanpan.dk

Product: Cucina D'Abruzzo – Green series™

What it's made of: Quantum™ non-stick, PFOA-free, aluminum free. Made from cast porcelain enamel. Comes with a 25-year guarantee.

Retail: Frying pan retails at around \$30.

Website: no website available. Made in China. Is that a concern? Perhaps.

Product: Green Pan™ from Stockholm.

What it's made of: Forged black aluminum, PTFE and PFOA free. It uses the science of Thermolon™ non-stick cookware.

Retail: Frying pan retails at around \$90.

Website: No website found. Comes from 'PRC' – figured it out – People's Republic of China.

Product: Cuisinox Jazz.

What it's made of: Hand-cast pure aluminum. A special 3-layer process. Not as 'sexy' as the others.

Retail: Frying pan retails at around \$49.

Website: No website found

Product: Paderno EcoPan™

What it's made of: Ceramic cookware. The smooth and colorful enamel is dishwasher-friendly and somewhat non-stick, and covers the entire surface of such cookware, unlike cast-iron pans. My all-time favourite. You're going to pay more, but in my estimation, it's well worth it.

Retail: Frying pan retails at around \$120.

Website: www.paderno.com

Product: Cuisinart –Green Gourmet Ceramica™

What it's made of: Patented non-stick technology that is 'anodized', and is PTFE and PFOE-free. Anodized means this electro-chemical process locks in the cookware's base metal, aluminum, so that it can't get into food, and makes for what many cooks consider an ideal non-stick and scratch-resistant cooking surface.

Retail: Small frying pan retails at around \$40.

Website: cuisinart.ca.

Product: Zen Cuizine™

What it's made of: Light-weight cast iron, coined LOOK Cookware™, made in Romania, specializes in cookware for Asian cuisine. Cast iron is known for its durability and even heat distribution. Cast iron cookware can also help ensure that eaters in your house get enough iron as it seeps off the cookware into food in small amounts. Zen is pre-seasoned.

Retail: Frying pan retails at around \$39.

Website: www.danescinc.com

Copper Cookware

Expensive, but nice. Copper warm-ups fast and offers even heat. Since copper can leak into food when heated, the cooking surfaces are usually lined with tin or stainless steel. Check specialty stores.

THANKS! Many thanks to **Capital Iron in Sidney** for helping me with this article, and letting me film in their amazing store. They offer a wide selection of great healthy non-stick pots and pans. Check them out!

[Capital Iron – There's No Store Like It!](#)

Sidney and Victoria locations.