

# self healing

CREATING OPTIMUM HEALTH FOR YOUR BODY AND SOUL

## How Healthy Is Your Cookware?

**Y**ou may not give much thought to the pots and pans you use to prepare meals except to notice how well they cook your food and how easy they are to clean. Those practicalities are important, but you should also consider the safety of the cooking surface. Here are my thoughts on the health effects of some common types of cookware.

**Aluminum.** An excellent conductor of heat and easy to care for, aluminum cookware has a drawback: Acidic foods like tomato-based products or wine react with the metal, causing it to leach into your food. Anodized aluminum pans have a thicker, harder surface and are less likely to leach, but my preference is not to have aluminum touching food at all since the health risks of ingesting it—including a much-disputed possible connection between aluminum and Alzheimer's disease—are unknown.

**Cast-iron.** Your body can absorb dietary iron from many acidic foods cooked in cast-iron pots and pans. Too much iron can cause health problems, so people who don't need extra amounts of the mineral might want to choose different cookware. Some

cast-iron cookware is covered with porcelain enamel, making it easier to care for and preventing leaching.

**Copper.** Although it conducts heat very well, copper is difficult to maintain, requiring constant attention. The metal leaches into food, and while our bodies need small amounts, most people get plenty from food. Consuming excess copper can cause nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea.

**Glass.** It's probably the safest and least reactive cookware, but because glass does not conduct heat well you are better off using it in the oven than on the stovetop.

**Stainless steel.** This metal does not conduct heat well, so many stainless steel pots and pans are now made with a layer of copper or aluminum underneath the stainless steel cooking surface to increase conductivity. Although they are durable, easy to clean, and relatively non-reactive, stainless steel does contain nickel and may cause allergic reactions in people who are sensitive to it.

**Teflon.** Nonstick surfaces allow you to use less oil when cooking, and they make cleaning a breeze. Yet, Teflon and other nonstick coatings are made with a toxic chemical called perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA).

PFOA persists in the environment and can cause cancer and birth defects in animals, but its effects on humans remain unclear. Although DuPont, the maker of Teflon, maintains that no appreciable amounts of PFOA leach into foods during cooking, the company and several other manufacturers have pledged by the year 2010 to reduce trace amounts of the compound in consumer products and in manufacturing emissions by 95 percent. That's good news, but Teflon presents yet another problem—when you heat a nonstick pan to a high enough temperature, the coating breaks down and releases fumes that can cause flu-like symptoms. There is some disagreement about the temperature at which this process begins. I would strongly urge you not to leave Teflon-coated pans unattended on the stovetop and to add liquid to them when frying to keep the temperature down.

**My bottom line:** I use Chantal enameled cast-iron and All-Clad pots and pans (layered aluminum and copper sandwiched between stainless steel) for most of my cooking. I recommend stainless steel cookware to most people because it's safe, efficient, and reasonably priced. ●

**fast fact** ▶ Ninety-nine percent of the body's calcium is located in bone, while the remainder is in the teeth and soft tissues.