

Exposing Toxic Chemicals in Consumer Products

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- › Leah Segedie founded Mamavation to investigate toxic chemicals in consumer products, inspired by family tragedies. The organization conducts independent testing and collaborates with scientists to educate the public about endocrine-disrupting chemicals (EDCs)
- › EDCs, often found in plastics and other products, can activate estrogen receptors and increase cellular calcium, leading to oxidative stress and potentially contributing to autoimmune diseases, especially in women
- › Mamavation tests for chemicals like PFAS, phthalates, and bisphenols in various products. Their work reveals that even some organic products may contain higher levels of contaminants than conventional alternatives
- › Strategies for reducing chemical body burden include blood donation to lower PFAS levels and using infrared saunas. Segedie aims to test products across the entire grocery store to provide comprehensive consumer information
- › By increasing awareness and demanding safer products, consumers can influence industry practices. Mamavation's work empowers individuals to make healthier choices and pressures companies to improve their products

In an eye-opening interview, I spoke with Leah Segedie, the founder of Mamavation, about her groundbreaking work investigating and exposing toxic chemicals in food and consumer products. Segedie's organization has become a beacon of hope for health-conscious consumers, conducting independent testing and research to help people

navigate the often-murky waters of grocery shopping and make informed, healthier choices.

Segedie's journey into the world of consumer product safety began with a personal tragedy that reshaped her life's purpose. She recounted the pivotal moment that set her on this path:¹

"When my father passed away from mesothelioma, it just rocked our family. And then after he passed away, I had an aunt die of breast cancer and uncle die of lung cancer and another uncle die of, you know, complications to pharmaceutical drugs.

From that whole experience of having a big extended Nordic family, we were so tight knit to just decimation and my cousins moving all across the United States, it was so impactful on me, it just gave me this desire to have two things. Health and family were the most important thing for me after that."

Mamavation's Mission: Empowering Consumers Through Knowledge

Since its creation in 2009, Mamavation has focused on a crucial yet often overlooked aspect of health: the presence of endocrine-disrupting chemicals (EDCs) in everyday products. Segedie explained the organization's core mission: "We help women navigate the grocery store by providing really hard-hitting investigations about hormone disrupting chemicals in food and consumer products."² This mission is carried out through a multifaceted approach:

- **Independent testing** — Mamavation commissions studies on a wide range of products, from dental floss and contact lenses to coconut oil and ghee, sending them to labs for analysis of contaminants such as PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances), phthalates, heavy metals and pesticides.
- **Scientific collaboration** — The organization works with a team of scientific advisors, including partners at prestigious institutions like Carnegie Mellon Institute, to

analyze the data and interpret the findings.

- **Public education** – Mamavation communicates its findings to the public through its website and social media channels, making complex scientific information accessible to everyday consumers.

Emphasizing the impact of this work, Segedie says:³

"I know that if I spend my own money and spend my resources and just start testing things, it moves the needle right away, because a lot of these companies, for the contaminants, a lot of these companies haven't done this testing. And the second I start doing it, it's out there in public, and then it kind of stops them from being able to say, 'Oh, we don't know.' Then they have to start looking into it themselves."

Increasing Awareness About EDCs May Lower Chronic Disease

My new book, "Cellular Health: The Unifying Theory of Health for Ultimate Longevity and Joy," will be out shortly and is filled with details on how to improve your mitochondrial function. It identifies three factors that contribute to virtually all diseases. If you address these factors, you can recover from most any disease.

The three factors include seed oils ([linoleic acid](#)), electromagnetic fields (EMFs) and EDCs, which is largely related to plastics, though there are many others as well. EDCs represent a broad category of substances that interfere with hormone function and have been linked to various health issues, including reproductive problems, developmental disorders and certain cancers.

These chemicals primarily work by activating estrogen receptors in your cells, similar to how EMFs activate voltage-gated calcium channels. This activation increases calcium influx into cells, and excess intracellular calcium dramatically increases superoxide and nitric oxide. These can quickly combine to form peroxynitrite, which is an extremely potent oxidant stressor. This leads to severe oxidative stress and cellular damage.

Interestingly, women naturally have higher estrogen levels than men, which could explain why most autoimmune diseases are significantly more prevalent in women. Examples include rheumatoid arthritis and multiple sclerosis.

While biological estrogen is necessary for optimal health, EDCs provide an additional estrogenic stimulus that activates estrogen receptors. When combined with natural estrogen, this can lead to overload and a variety of diseases through a destructive chain of events:

1. It decreases mitochondrial energy production.
2. This reduction in energy disrupts the no-oxygen environment needed for beneficial gut bacteria.
3. Without the right environment, these bacteria can't produce short-chain fatty acids that nourish and maintain gut health.
4. This leads to increased gut permeability, also known as leaky gut.
5. Proteins that resemble structures in your body, like joints or neurological tissues, can then leak through the gut barrier, and your body may start reacting against these proteins, triggering an autoimmune response.

The key to addressing these issues is reducing estrogenic stress. So, Segedie's strategy of testing consumer products for EDCs and increasing awareness of where to find them – and how to avoid them – is a powerful approach to tackling these autoimmune diseases by lowering this estrogenic burden.

PFAS, Phthalates and Other EDCs Are Key Chemicals of Concern

Segedie discussed several classes of chemicals that are of particular concern due to their potential health impacts. These include:

- **PFAS** – Often referred to as "forever chemicals," PFAS are a group of man-made chemicals that persist in the environment and human body for extended periods. Segedie noted, "PFAS is primarily the one that my advisors are concerned with ...

The reason for that is the persistence of the chemicals ... depending on the type of chemical you have in your body, it can take from months to 40 years to get it out of your body."

- **Phthalates** – These chemicals are commonly used as plasticizers and can be found in a wide range of products, from food packaging to personal care items.
- **Bisphenols** – Including the well-known BPA and its substitutes, these chemicals are often found in plastic products and food can linings.
- **Certain pesticides** – Some agricultural chemicals, like glyphosate, have been linked to endocrine disruption and other health concerns.

By testing consumer products for these toxic chemicals and alerting the public, Segedie and her team are, in many ways, doing what many people perceive to be the job of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). This includes looking at the cumulative burden of environmental chemicals, which Segedie describes as a "chemical hormonal soup:"⁴

"My advisors are all about that soup that we're unaware of. You know, the chemical hormonal soup. All of these EDCs are working together in a soup that we don't understand. Lobbying for many, many decades has created a situation where the FDA ... ignores most of the soup.

Just to give you an example, when the FDA evaluates pesticides, they only look at the active ingredient, they don't look at all of the additional chemicals in the formulation ... if we leave it up to the FDA, man, we're gonna be dead before they started testing everything."

The Challenge of Testing and Transparency

One of the major obstacles in addressing chemical contamination in consumer products is the lack of comprehensive testing and transparency in the supply chain. For instance, PFAS are used to make fluoropolymer coatings and other products, but there are no

tests to identify them. With 15,000 known PFAS chemicals, this presents a significant risk for consumers. According to Segedie:⁵

"The hardest thing about the fluoropolymers is they are impossible to identify ... there are no tests to identify these fluoropolymers. So, PTFE Teflon, that's just one example. You know that chemical is out there, but there's not a test to identify it.

So, if you don't have a test to identify something, you can't test the health impact of the chemical ... there's 15,000 of these PFAS chemicals out there ... most of the tests that are used [only test for] 18 chemicals, 25 chemicals, 40 chemicals, and that's what the brands are testing for. And that's pretty much it.

So, what I'm doing is a little different. And I'm doing this with the blessing of my advisors who work with PFAS chemicals. I'm doing organic fluorine testing, because organic fluorine is what all of these chemicals have in common. And 99.9% of the time, when you're finding organic fluorine, you are finding a type of PFAS, or you're finding a type of chemical that you do not want to put on your list."

This lack of testing, whether due to ignorance or deliberate avoidance, creates a significant information gap for consumers. Mamavation's work aims to fill this gap, providing independent data that can drive both consumer awareness and industry change.

One of the most unexpected outcomes of Mamavation's investigations has been the discovery that some organic products may contain higher levels of certain contaminants than their conventional counterparts. Segedie explained this counterintuitive finding:⁶

"The hardest thing about this is the amount of organic products that we have found that have foreign nation issues where the conventional stuff does not ... These manufacturers or smaller manufacturers that many years ago were not as relevant decided to become organic, but don't have the more modern

facilities ... to be able to support a product that would not be contaminated with a fluorine or something like that."

This revelation underscores the importance of comprehensive testing across all product categories, including those perceived as healthier options. It also highlights the complex nature of chemical contamination in the food supply chain, where well-intentioned choices, like switching to organic products, is a step in the right direction but isn't always enough to guarantee your food is toxin-free.

"I put ... many years [into] growing the [organic] industry. And now I find myself in a very ironic position where I'm testing them quite a bit and saying to them, y'all need to start working on PFAS, you really need to start testing for these things," Segedie says.⁷

Blood Donation and Sauna Usage Are Important Detoxification Strategies

Given the ubiquity of these chemicals in our environment, strategies for reducing the body burden of these substances are urgently needed. For PFAS specifically, Segedie highlighted an interesting finding from research on firefighters, who are exposed to high levels of these chemicals in firefighting foam: "The best way that they found to get rid of PFAS is to donate your blood."⁸

This discovery offers a potential avenue for individuals looking to reduce their PFAS levels and offers additional health benefits as well, including [lowering your iron levels](#). This may be particularly important for men and postmenopausal women, as menstruating women lose blood with each monthly cycle.

You can also [use an infrared sauna](#) to support detoxification. While Segedie said she starts her sauna at 100 degrees F and goes up to 120 degrees F over the course of 30 minutes, I recommend starting at 120 degrees and gradually increasing the temperature by 2 degrees a week. The disadvantage of using lower temperatures is that you need to stay in the sauna much longer to get the benefits, one hour at 120 versus 16 minutes at 150 (in a far infrared sauna).

As a veteran sauna user, I use temperatures in a far infrared sauna between 160 and 170 degrees F. However, you don't need to go that high – and should not start out that high if you're a new sauna user.

The Power of Consumer Awareness and Action

Segedie's work with Mamavation demonstrates how independent testing and information sharing can influence both consumer choices and industry practices. Organizations like Mamavation are filling in the gaps left by regulatory agencies and holding industries accountable.

Ultimately, Segedie said, "I want to test the entire grocery store. I mean, that's my first plan right now is just to get as much as I possibly can tested and I'm expanding our testing."⁹ This goal underscores the vast scale of the chemical contamination issue and the need for comprehensive, independent testing to provide consumers with the information they need to make informed choices.

It also serves as a powerful call to action for consumers, industry leaders and policymakers alike. By shining a light on the hidden dangers lurking in everyday products, Mamavation's work empowers individuals to make healthier choices and puts pressure on companies to improve their practices.

As more people become aware of these issues and demand safer products, companies will be compelled to respond, potentially leading to a healthier, less toxic future for all. By staying informed, supporting independent research and making conscious choices, we can all play a part in creating a purer world, free from the toxic chemicals in our everyday lives. You can find out more about Leah Segedie and her many consumer product investigations at [Mamavation.com](https://www.mamavation.com).

Sources and References

- ^{1, 3} [Dr. Mercola Interviews Leah Segedie, 3:42](#)
- ² [Dr. Mercola Interviews Leah Segedie, 0:27](#)
- ⁴ [Dr. Mercola Interviews Leah Segedie, 19:39](#)

- ⁵ Dr. Mercola Interviews Leah Segedie, 22:45
- ^{6, 7} Dr. Mercola Interviews Leah Segedie, 37:32
- ⁸ Dr. Mercola Interviews Leah Segedie, 47:03
- ⁹ Dr. Mercola Interviews Leah Segedie, 33:58