

## Toxic Chemicals Lowering IQ?

by Raymond Francis

Why is educational performance so bad? One reason is American children are getting dumber. SAT scores have been declining for decades. In response, our educational establishment has progressively lowered standards and dumbed down achievement tests to avoid embarrassment, but the scores continue to drop anyway. Despite the fact that we are spending more money than ever before on education, numerous studies show a decline in cognitive ability—our ability to think and reason. For a country whose prosperity is founded on superior technology, these are ominous trends. Why are these things happening and what can we do about them?

As our children continue to suffer problems with intelligence, learning, poor academic performance, behavior, violence, and suicide, some insights are being provided by the National Children's Study into the causes of these problems. The study identified a number of common environmental chemicals that can cause pregnant women to have children whose IQs are up to ten points lower than they should be—*this is a significant reduction in intelligence; it is dumbing down our population.*

It is now believed that many learning disabilities and behavioral problems in children are the direct result of the mother's exposure to common chemicals that impair the mother's thyroid, causing subclinical hypothyroidism. Thyroid hormone is essential for normal brain development of the fetus. Lack of it lowers IQ as well as causing behavioral problems.

There is an emerging consensus that people are highly vulnerable to the effects of environmental toxins and that old assumptions regarding toxins and human health are wrong. Scientific findings during the last decade indicate that common environmental chemicals affect health at substantially lower levels than previously thought. In addition, different chemicals acting together can have an impact thousands of times greater than any of them acting alone. Children have been found to be especially susceptible to chemical exposure. A 2000 report by the National Academy of Sciences estimated that *more than 25 percent of developmental and neurological problems in children were due to these environmental chemicals.* To make matters worse, alarming levels of toxic chemicals are being found in human tissue. Common chemicals such as bisphenyl-A, perchlorate, PCBs, and flame retardants have been found to bind to thyroid receptor sites and to disrupt normal thyroid hormone function.

Bisphenyl-A has been found to have profound health effects at very low levels. This chemical is found in canned beverages and foods, large water bottles for home use, and other sources.

Perchlorate is a contaminant in the drinking water of at least 20 states. Farm crops irrigated with such water will result in contaminated crops, and such crops are being sold to the public all over the country—even organic crops.

PCBs are found in drinking water, fish (especially farmed fish), meat, and milk. In July 2003, the Environmental Working Group released a report stating that farmed salmon purchased in the United States contain the highest level of PCBs in the food supply system. They reported that farmed salmon have 16 times the PCBs found in wild salmon, 4 times the PCBs in beef, and 3.4 times the PCBs in other seafood. Most of the salmon on the market is now the farmed variety. Know what you are eating!

Flame retardants are found in fish, drinking water, cow's milk, mother's milk, clothes, mattresses, electronic appliances, and furniture. These retardants are used to make furniture, foam, and electronics and are now showing up in human breast milk. In fact, American women were found to have the highest

levels in the world, 10 to 20 times higher than European women. These chemicals are now everywhere, contaminating the air we breathe in our homes, cars, and workplaces. Anywhere from 5 to 35 percent of products like carpets, draperies, sofas, foam upholstery, appliances, TVs, and computer components consist of flame retardants. These chemicals are being found in household dust that people are breathing, and some of the highest levels have been found in the dust near computers.

Still another problem is fluoride. Fluoride suppresses thyroid function and also directly damages brain cells. The effects on brain function are both severe and cumulative. Studies have shown that children born in high-fluoride communities have lower IQs (ten-point drops) and fewer really bright people than those born in low-fluoride communities. Fluoride is found in tap water, toothpaste, soft drinks, fruit juice, and almost all processed foods. Fluoridated drinking water also does something else. Because of its chemical activity, fluoride doubles the amount of lead in tap water. Even in very small concentrations, lead will damage brain function, causing problems with learning and behavior. Lead is well associated with crime, violent behavior, substance abuse, and hyperactivity.

The other component of the IQ equation that needs to be addressed is nutrition. A growing brain must be supplied with all raw materials it needs for its proper construction. Few women today supply the required building blocks to their fetus or to their young children. Most especially lacking are critical vitamins, minerals, and essential fatty acids.

The connection of brain damage to environmental chemicals is an alarm bell ringing. Pregnant women must be especially careful to avoid these chemicals. Frequent saunas are necessary to reduce the overall load of bioaccumulated toxins; saunas have become a "household necessity." Air filters, water filters, and organically produced foods are necessities as well. Limiting toxic exposure is essential. Safe, effective, nontoxic products such as high-quality saunas, air filters, reverse osmosis water filters, supplements, foods, and personal care products are available at Beyond Health.

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