



## WELLNESS

## In the News

## Catch up on the latest wellness-related developments from the past month.

### Spring Allergy Season Expected to Be Longer and More Severe

As the weather warms up, millions of people are experiencing spring allergies. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), more than 1 in 3 adults and 1 in 4 children suffer from seasonal allergies. If the spring allergy season has felt longer and more severe, that's because it is. Public health organizations, including the CDC and the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America, are citing climate change as a possible contributing factor to worsening allergy seasons.

In fact, researchers at Climate Central, an independent group of scientists and communicators, found that the pollen season in the United States is roughly three weeks longer now than it was 50 years ago. The longer pollen season correlates with a longer growing season (or freeze-free season). Warmer temperatures mean that pollinating plants may experience earlier and longer growing seasons, which, in turn, produce more pollen. Tree pollen is the most common spring allergen, with grass pollen occurring in June and July. Ragweed is a common fall allergen, but it can bloom as early as August.

While you can't control the weather, you can take steps to reduce your exposure to seasonal allergens. Health experts recommend closing doors

and windows and using high-efficiency particulate air (or HEPA) filters on your heating, ventilating and air conditioning units to keep pollen outside your home. Like viruses, pollen can also be on your hands, so wash your hands frequently and shower after spending time outdoors. If you plan to be outside, be sure to monitor allergens, especially tree pollen and mold, online or on the local news so you can try to avoid excessive time outdoors when allergens will impact your body the most. For many people, avoiding allergens and using over-the-counter medications are enough to ease their allergy symptoms. Talk to your doctor if your symptoms remain bothersome; they can provide guidance on alternative treatments.

### Study Finds Microplastics in Chewing Gum

Research presented at an American Chemical Society meeting in March revealed that an average of 100 microplastics were released per gram of chewing gum, with some producing up to 600 microplastics per gram. This research has yet to be published in a peer-reviewed journal.

Past research estimates that an individual consumes between 39,000 and 52,000 particles of microplastics annually. While most food-related studies focus on food contamination from plastic containers (e.g., plastic water bottles), this new lab work explored

how the human body can be exposed to microplastics through ingestion and inhalation.

The researchers examined five synthetic gum types and five commercially available natural gums through saliva samples. While it was assumed that organic chewing gum would have fewer microplastics, the results revealed that synthetic and natural chewing gums contained a similar amount.

So many of today's everyday items—dinnerware, electronics, toys, clothing—are made with plastic. Plastic is durable and difficult to break down, making it practically impossible to degrade in the natural environment. The U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration defines "microplastics" as pieces of plastic that are less than 5 millimeters in length. Some microplastics start this small during production or can result from larger plastics breaking apart over time. Health experts warn that they can damage cells or induce inflammatory and immune reactions. Despite that, the full impact of microplastics on human health isn't known yet at this time.

### FDA Bans Red No. 3 Dye

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recently announced a ban on the use of Red No. 3 dye, also known as simply "Red 3," in food products and medications. This decision was in response to a petition from health groups and activists citing Red 3's link to cancer. Red 3 is largely banned in the European Union, Japan, China, Australia and New Zealand. A couple of studies have shown that high levels of the food dye were linked to cancer in rats. However, the FDA noted that the link between the dye and cancer doesn't occur in humans and other animals.

While a direct link between Red 3 and cancer in people hasn't been established, there are other health risks of note. Studies found that Red No. 3 dye disrupts thyroid hormone regulation, which can increase one's risk of thyroid-related disorders. Studies have also found an association between

artificial food coloring intake and behavioral outcomes for children, such as inattention and hyperactivity.

Petroleum-based Red No. 3 dye is often used in candy, baked goods, cereals and icings. It can also be found in sodas, juices, gummy vitamins and cough syrups. It's typically in foods, beverages and ingested drugs that have a bright, cherry-red color. This database lists more than 9,000 brand-name foods that include Red 3. Furthermore, the FDA requires that color additives be listed on food labels. The additive may be listed as Red 3, FD&C Red No. 3, FD&C Red 3 and erythrosine. For nontopical medications, you can check for dyes in the inactive ingredients section of the label or package insert.

The FDA's ban on food products and beverages will take effect in January 2027, and consumable medications will be banned in January 2028. Foods imported to the United States must also comply with the requirements. The ban will not be implemented for some time, so products containing Red 3 could still be on the market for the next two years.

Stay tuned for more wellness-related news and developments.