HEALTHY EATING (https://www.rd.com/health/healthy-eating/)

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9 Disgusting (and Dangerous) Things You Don't Realize You're Eating

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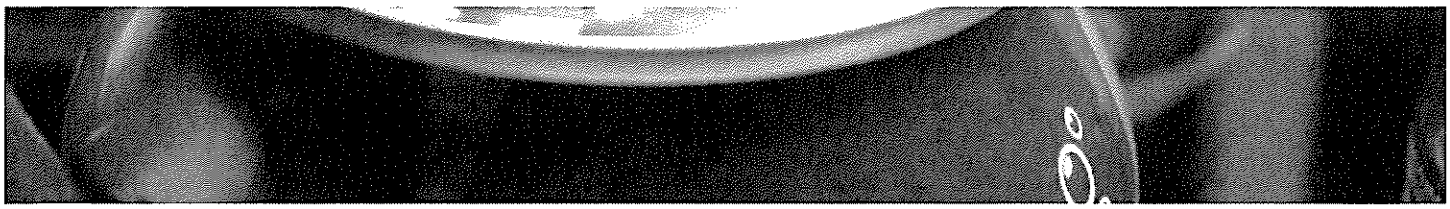
Beware of putting these seemingly innocent foods on your kitchen table—and in your mouth.

Flame retardants in soda



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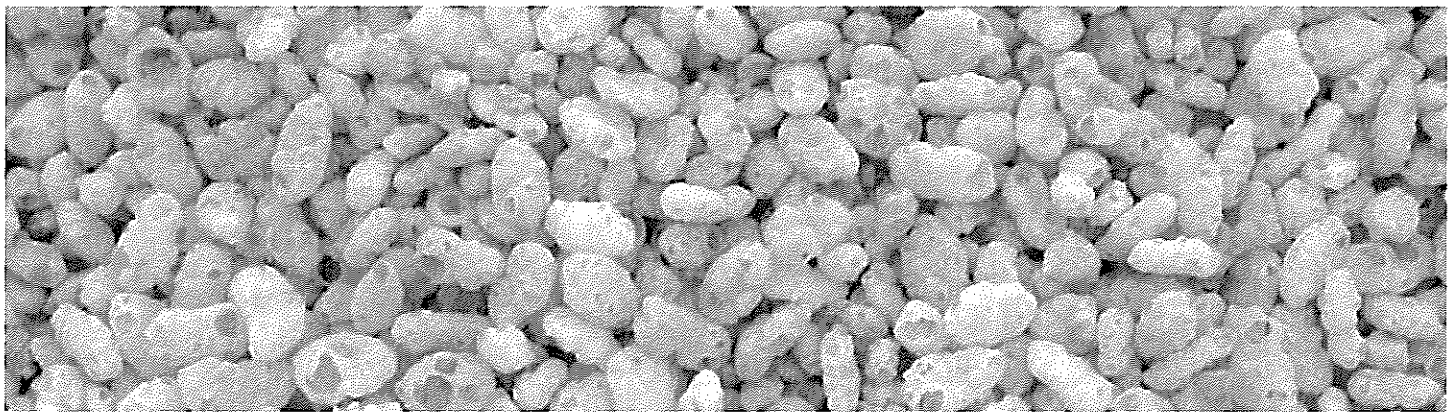
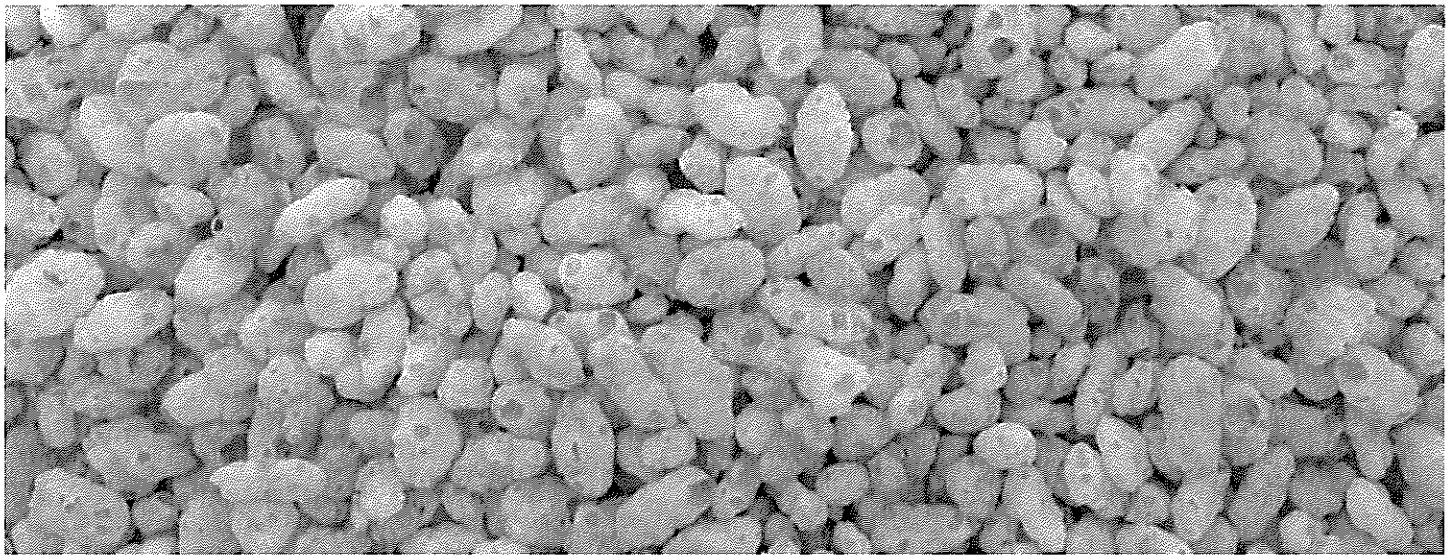
Addicted to chugging carbonated beverages? You may want to think twice. This toxic flame retardant, subtly listed under ingredients as brominated vegetable oil (BVO), is banned as a food additive in Europe and Japan, yet it still remains open in the U.S. For years, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) **has allowed BVO to be used as a food additive (https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/nutrition-and-healthy-eating/expert-answers/bvo/faq-20058236)** "under certain conditions and on an interim basis pending more research." The substance was originally used to keep plastics from catching on fire, but can now be found in certain sodas and sports drinks, including Fanta, Mountain Dew, and Gatorade. While the food industry claims that it's beneficial to keeping artificial flavoring chemicals from separating in the liquid, health studies have linked overconsumption of BVO to unnerving symptoms, such as skin lesions, memory loss, early onset puberty, and impaired neurological abilities. If you want to be safe, thoroughly inspect all ingredient labels, or better yet, just cut back on all sugary drinks completely. Not entirely convinced? These are **10 huge reasons you should quit soda altogether (https://www.rd.com/health/healthy-eating/avoid-soda/1)**.

Arsenic in rice





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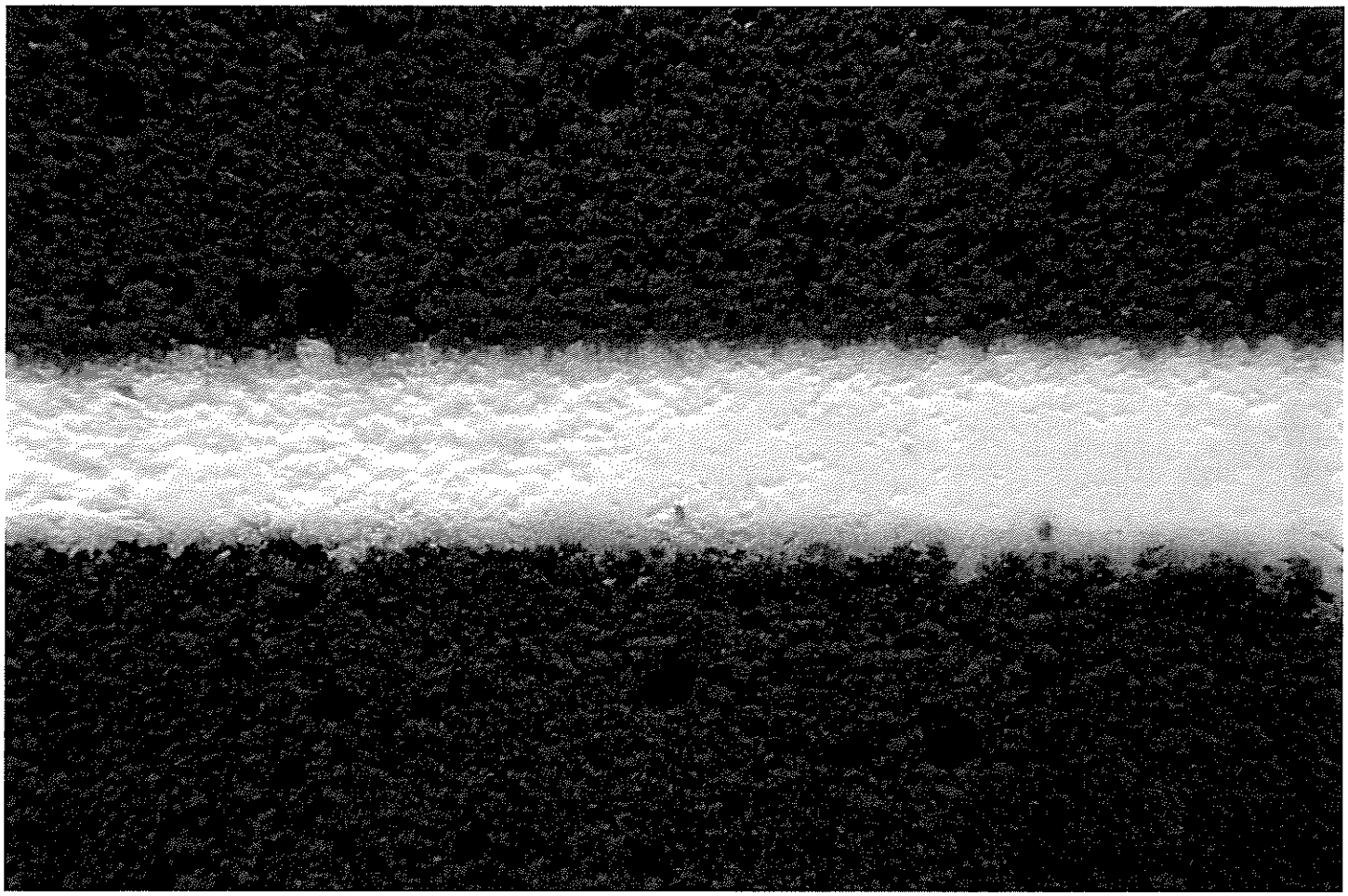
Arsenic is an earthly element that is naturally prevalent in the water and soil (termed as organic arsenic), so it's only natural that it's found floating around in the air. However, the substance can also derive from human efforts in activities like mining and the use of pesticides (termed as inorganic arsenic). Although the **FDA has been monitoring the levels of arsenic in foods (https://www.fda.gov/food/foodborneillnesscontaminants/metals/ucm319870.htm)** for quite some time, in April 2016, they gave the OK to a limit of 100 parts per billion (ppb) for inorganic arsenic in infant foods such as rice cereal. In particular, rice contains significant levels of inorganic arsenic (which is considered to be more toxic than its organic counterpart) because its grain tends to absorb arsenic more readily than other food crops. This type of arsenic has been identified as a carcinogen, associated with ailments, such as **lung, skin, and bladder cancer (https://www.cancer.org/cancer/cancer-causes/arsenic.html)**, and even linked to heart disease and type 2 diabetes. As an alternative, try switching up your grains. According to a **study (https://www.consumerreports.org/cro/magazine/2015/01/how-much-arsenic-is-in-your-rice/index.htm)** by Consumer Reports, brown rice has higher levels of arsenic than white because of its husk. You can also try cooking rice in a particular way—boiling the rice in a 6:1 water-to-rice ratio and draining the excess water once cooked **has been proven (https://www.consumerreports.org/cro/magazine/2015/01/how-much-arsenic-is-in-your-rice/index.htm)** to remove up to 60 percent of arsenic levels in rice. Like rice, check out **17 more healthy foods that can actually be dangerous to overeat (https://www.rd.com/health/diet-**

weight-loss/healthy-foods-never-overeat/).

Crushed bug shells in food coloring



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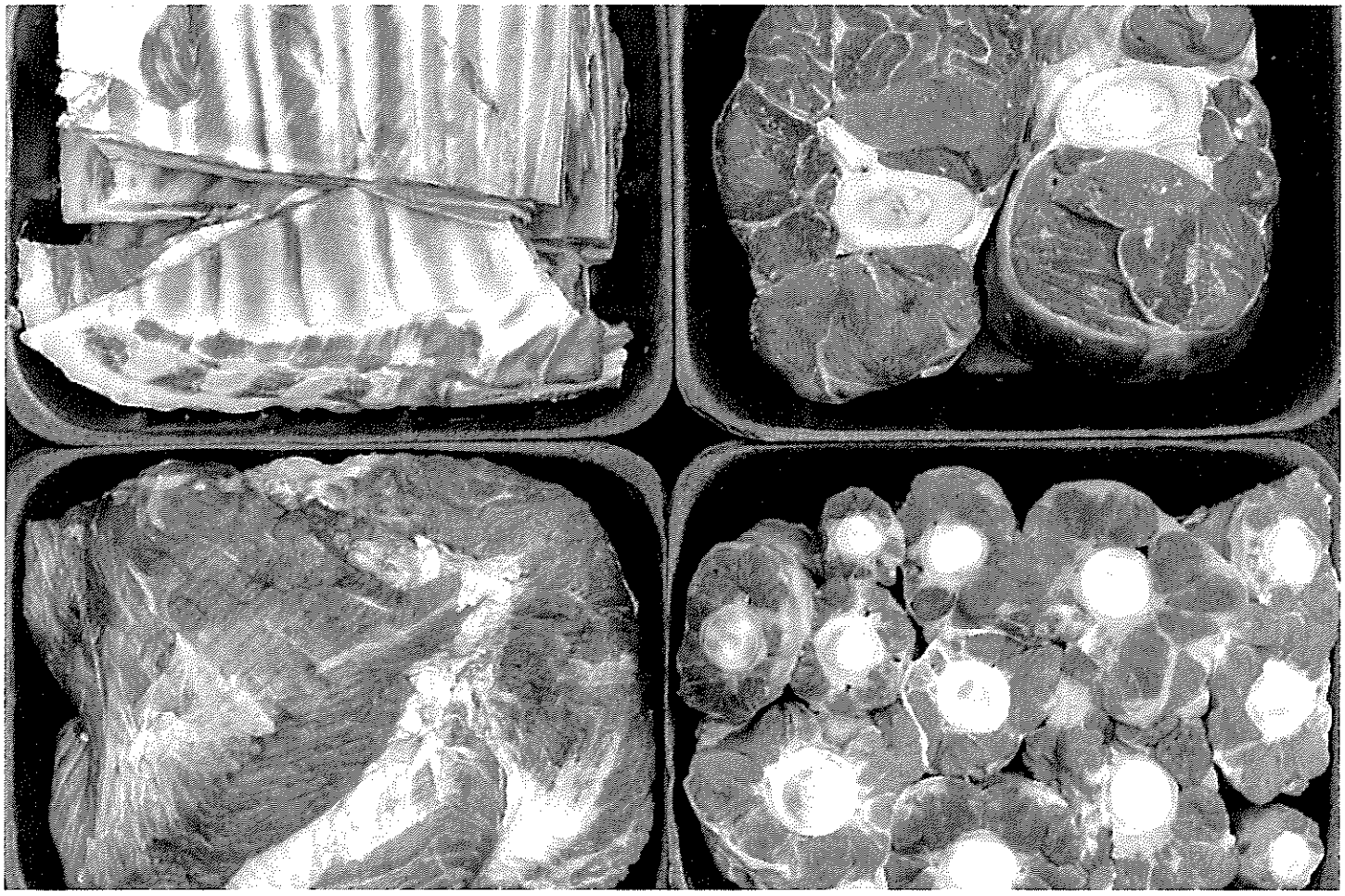
Red food dye is a staple for any baking enthusiast; they've long been used to help our favorite red velvet pastries achieve its rich color. Unfortunately, the aesthetic appeal also comes with a pretty hefty price—much of the red coloring infused in food is actually comprised of crushed bugs, specifically cochineal insects. According to **Live Science (https://www.livescience.com/36292-red-food-dye-bugs-cochineal-carmine.html)**, these guys are harvested mainly in Peru and the Canary Islands on plantations of prickly pear cacti. They spend their days sucking on the plant's sap and producing a crimson pigment called carminic acid that

they use to ward off predators. Manufacturers like to dry, crush, and dunk these insects into an acidic alcoholic solution to produce carmine extract (i.e. red dye). Even until 2009, cochineal was categorized as one of the many dyes that fall under the blanket term "natural color" on the nutrition info, but because it triggered severe allergic reactions in many people, the FDA now requires cochineal extract to be explicitly identified. We recommend you check the ingredients list or just stick to natural coloring. Thinking about dying your red velvet cake green instead? Think again. Read **the other artificial food colorings you need to watch out for (https://www.rd.com/health/conditions/rainbow-risks-6-artificial-food-colors-you-need-to-know-about/1)**.

Flesh-eating bacteria in beef



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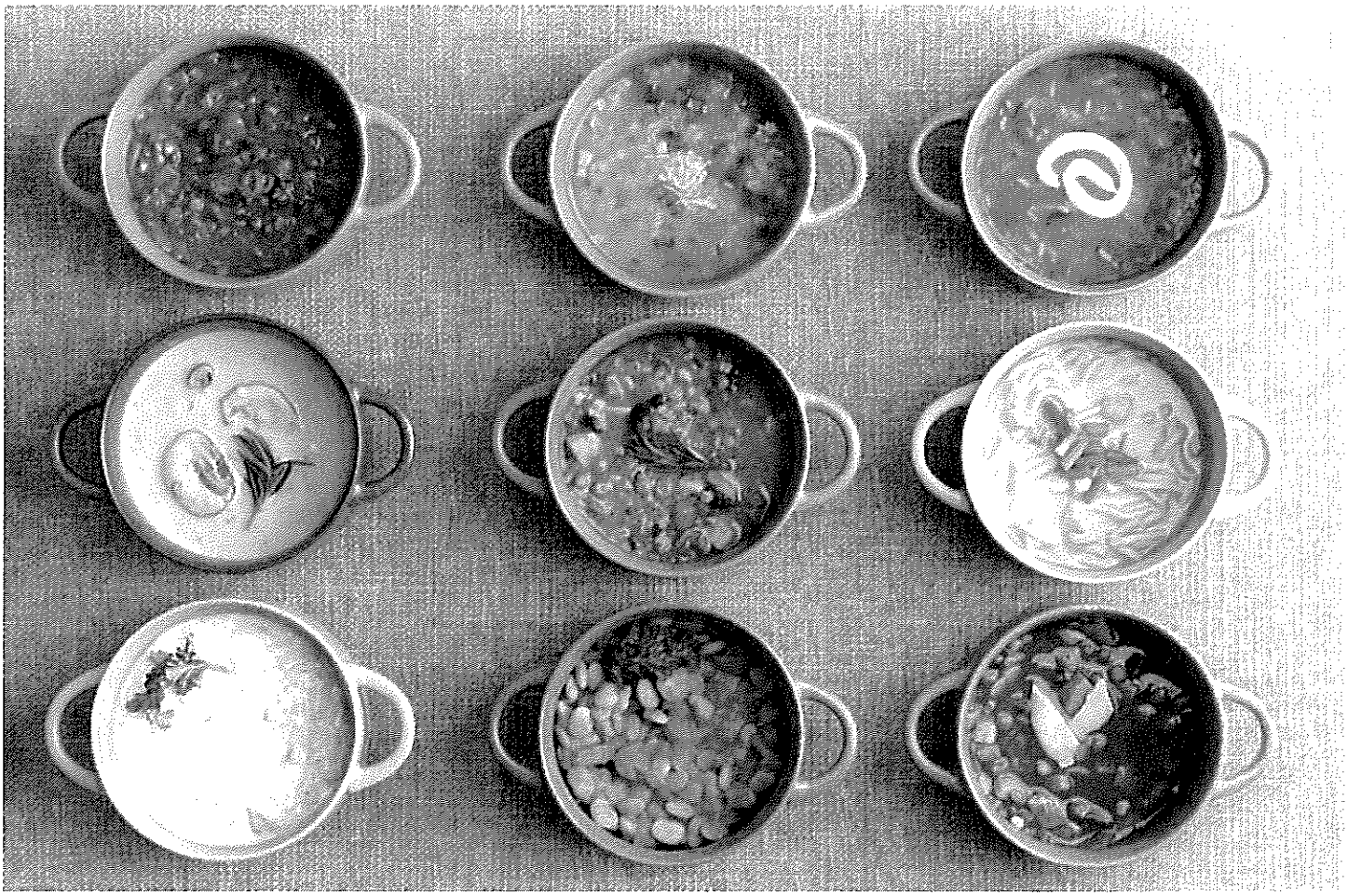
Turns out A-1 might not be the only thing you're having with your steak. According to a study published in **Clinical Infectious Diseases (https://academic.oup.com/cid/article/52/10/1227/478217/Multidrug-Resistant-Staphylococcus-aureus-in-US)**, an overwhelming 50 percent of grocery store meats tested positive for staph bacteria, including the potentially lethal MRSA strain. To minimize the threat of listeria, the FDA allows the food industry to spray deli meats with the same bacteriophages that hospitals and veterinarians use to kill germs. These remnants are far from harmless; **Science Daily (https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2012/01/120120182427.htm)** informs that the meat infestation is estimated to cause around 185,000 cases of food poisoning each year. The bacteria can also cause serious, life-threatening infections of the bloodstream, skin, lungs, and other organs. In light of this information, investing in grass-fed meat from organic farmers may be worth the extra bucks. Feeling bombarded by all of the news about bacteria-laden groceries lately? **Check out more of the dangers in our food supply (https://www.rd.com/health/conditions/danger-food-supply/)** and why it's happening.

Sand in instant powder soup



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Ever wonder why your packaged soup tastes a little gritty? Well, turns out that silicon dioxide (most commonly known as the sand that gets in your bathing suit at the beach) is commonly implemented in certain foods as an anti-clumping agent and humidity controller. You'll generally find it in dry coffee creamer, dried soups, and other powdery meals. The same substance is also frequently used for insect repellent because they do a great job at removing the oily film that covers an insect's body. Although the EPA concluded that the human health risk is "not unreasonable," heavy consumption has been associated to **the risk of developing autoimmune diseases (https://www.hindawi.com/journals/arthritis/2012/604187/)**. Although you don't have to worry too much about ingesting some at the dinner table, try refraining from pre-packaged foods if you can help it.

Paint chemicals in salad dressing

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We all love a good salad. But while your creamy white ranch may look savory, there may be something embedded within that's definitely not as appetizing. Commonly used in paints and sunscreens, titanium dioxide (a mined substance that is frequently mingled with toxic lead) is often added to processed foods in order to make them look whiter and visually appealing. Furthermore, propylene glycol, an element frequently used as antifreeze, is often imbued into salad dressings as a thickening agent to help achieve that familiar luscious texture. While the color white may be associated with pureness and cleanliness, don't be fooled. This whitening agent can transport certain inflammatory chemicals to your intestinal tract, sparking bowel swelling and severe digestive issues. Consequent inflammation has also been linked to increased chances of IBS and colon cancer. Needless to say, it's not exactly what we'd deem

healthy eating. Next time you're in the salad dressing aisle, watch out for titanium dioxides and the **4 most harmful ingredients in packaged foods (https://www.rd.com/health/diet-weight-loss/4-most-harmful-ingredients-in-packaged-foods/)**.

Maggots in canned mushrooms

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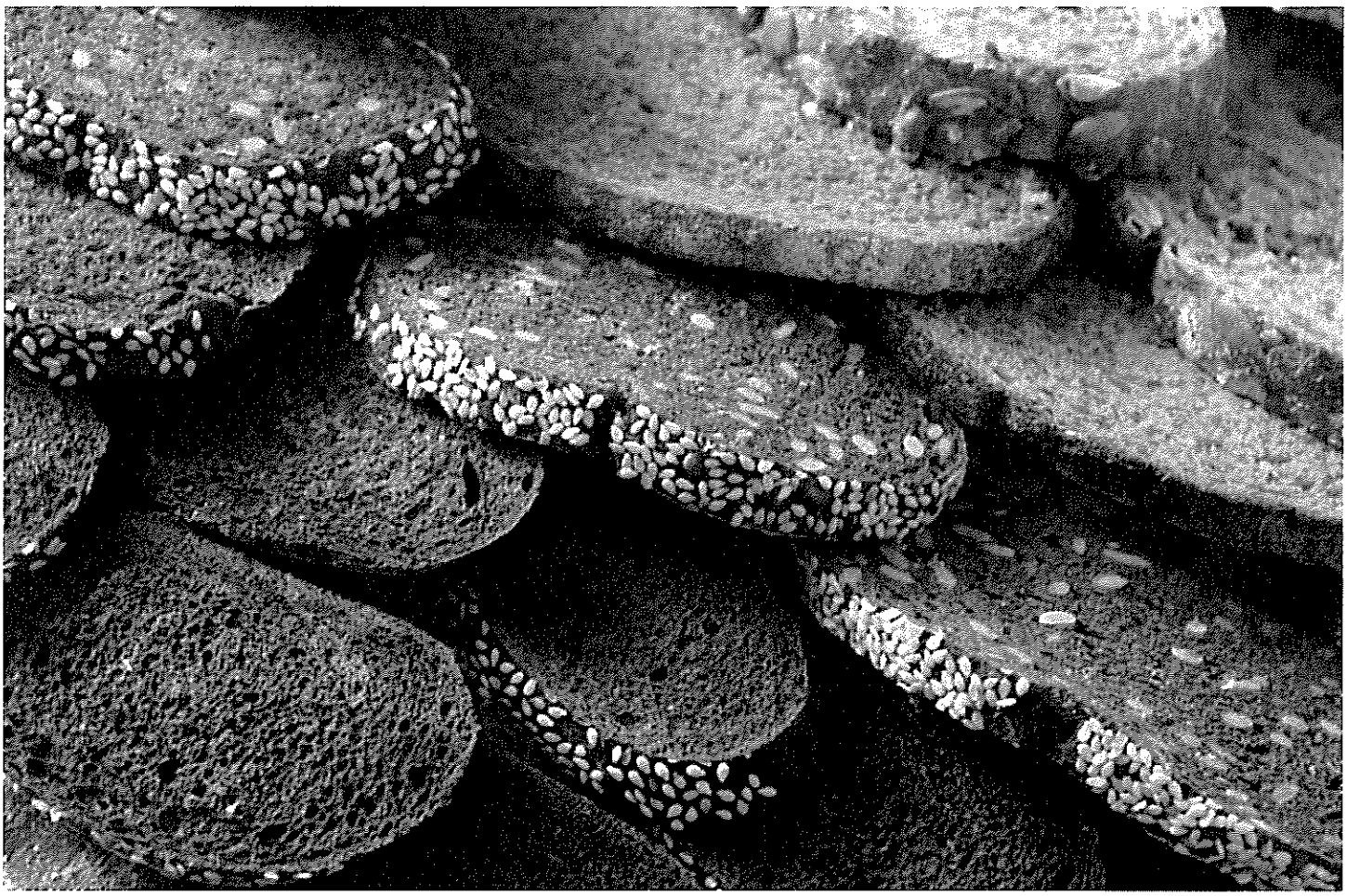
In case you're not aware what maggots are, these tiny legless larvae typically develops in decaying organic matter or as a parasite in plants or animals. Grossed out yet? Surprisingly, the **FDA legally allows (https://www.fda.gov/ICECI/ComplianceManuals/CompliancePolicyGuidanceManual/ucm074626.htn** 19 maggots and 74 mites in a 3.5-ounce can of mushrooms before it's deemed problematic.

While maggots may have certain medical benefits (they can help clean dirty wounds by feeding on dead tissue), the idea of ingesting them is still pretty gross. If the concept of dining on baby worms triggers your gag reflex, you may want to stick to fresh, organic mushrooms next time.

Human hair in bread



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Don't go rummaging through your local bakery in hopes of detecting strands of hair–the hair here will be much more difficult to spot. Scientifically termed as L-cysteine, this semi-essential proteinogenic amino acid is obtained industrially by hydrolysis of poultry feathers, hog hair, or—wait for it—dissolved human hair. Manufacturers often use it as a commercial dough conditioner and flavor enhancer to improve the flaky texture of breads and other baked goods.

Believe it or not, the stuff is pretty common, so you can probably expect to have eaten some already if you're a pastry fan. Don't be too alarmed: Although it's not medically toxic, it could provide an ethical dilemma for vegans swallowing it unknowingly. Read up on **7 high-carb foods that could kill you if you don't stop eating them (https://www.rd.com/health/conditions/high-carb-foods-that-can-kill/)**. (Hint: white bread is one of them!)

Nonstick chemicals in microwaveable popcorn

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If you're a fan of home movie marathons, take heed: You may want to opt for sweet treats over this salty fare. Industrial nonstick elements—that are classified as perfluorinated chemicals—are commonly used to coat the inside of popcorn bags in order to prevent the grease from leaking out. Unfortunately, **data from human studies (https://www.niehs.nih.gov/health/materials/perflourinated_chemicals_508.pdf)** suggests that PFCs can also have effects on human health, including high cholesterol, sperm damage and infertility, and ADHD. A **study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association (https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/1104903)** also discovered that nonstick chemicals in popcorn bags can significantly impair the immune system, leaving the body vulnerable to a myriad of other health maladies. If you're addicted to munching on these kernels during your favorite flick, making it the good old-fashioned way—with a pot on the stove top—is always a great alternative.