

According to a new U.S. Congressional report, some of America's biggest manufacturers of baby food have not been adequately testing and removing products with dangerous levels of heavy metals. The heavy metals mentioned in the report - cadmium, lead, mercury, and inorganic arsenic - are harmful in any amount. Lead is toxic to children's brains, and no amount has been deemed safe. Arsenic and mercury are also neurotoxins. Infants and young children are particularly sensitive to these contaminants, since their brains and organ systems aren't fully developed.

It's important to note that, unfortunately, these contaminants exist in the environment, so the idea that you could eat a contaminant-free diet or buy products that have no contaminants is not feasible. Foods take up metals like lead and arsenic from the soil and water and can also become contaminated during storage, processing, or transport. Making your own baby food doesn't mean you're in the clear, either, since even fresh produce can have these contaminants.

In response to the concerns raised by the Congressional report, the FDA plans to propose limits on arsenic, lead and mercury in baby food. "We recognize that Americans want zero toxic elements in the foods eaten by their babies and young children... The FDA's goal, therefore is to reduce the levels of arsenic, lead, cadmium, and mercury in these foods to the greatest extent possible."

To help combat heavy metal consumption, parents can choose safer alternatives to concerning baby foods. For example, instead of rice puffs, parents can give their children rice-free snacks. Similarly, they can give children tap water instead of fruit juice; oatmeal or barley cereal instead of rice cereal; and frozen banana or chilled cucumber instead of teething biscuits. And you should always do your research and reach out to companies if you have questions.