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Glitter, is it bad for health and the environment?

Glitter is notorious for getting everywhere – touch one sparkly birthday card and you’ll be finding flecks of the stuff in your food, hair and carpet for months. It’s so obnoxious, it’s now become a trend to “glitter bomb” your enemies. That’s right, glitter has been weaponized; girls returning old hoodies to their exes will dump the hoodie and tons of glitter in a bag before returning the garment. The glitter gets everywhere and causes a huge inconvenience. It truly does get everywhere: not just in your home, but also into the farthest-flung corners of the Earth.

The reason this is so bad is because glitter is actually microplastic! Which is loosely defined as small plastic particles less than 5 millimetres in size (Matei, 2020). The small shards can be released into the environment directly, or come from larger plastic waste that



degrades into smaller plastic fragments. Glitter is commonly made of a plastic called polyethylene terephthalate (PET), which is coated with aluminium to create a reflective surface. Some glitter can also be made of polyvinyl chloride (PVC), another plastic material (Matei, 2020). Simply put, glitter is microplastic, too. And because microplastics are a big part of global pollution, it’s important to understand how they affect human and environmental health.





A lot of microplastics end up in the ocean where they can be mistaken for fish eggs and ingested by other sea creatures. When ingested, these tiny pieces of plastic can get trapped in their stomachs and cause malnutrition, severe weight loss and eventually death (*Yes, Glitter Really Is Bad for the Environment*, n.d.). The vast majority of fish and the rest of the food chain are now contaminated with microplastics. The farther up the food chain you look the more condensed and saturated the contamination of microplastics are in that animal. By the time the animal by-product reaches our dinner tables, it is heavily contaminated with microplastics. Furthermore, because microplastics are so tiny they contaminate the water itself as well. Meaning they are in our drinking water too. It's gotten to the point that microplastics are even found in the placenta of unborn infants (Carrington & editor, 2020).

The second biggest way microplastics pollute the environment is through the air (Matei, 2020). Since glitter is very light weight and super tiny it is easily carried over long distances and through the air. Air quality is super important to human health, so polluting the air in any way is bad news. The worst is when glitter is inhaled. Inhaling glitter is so dangerous, as it can deliver chemicals to the lower parts of the lungs and maybe even into the bloodstream (Cunningham, 2018). If glitter gets in your eyes, it can make you lose your vision. Knowing this and knowing glitter eyeshadow exists, feels wrong.

Glitter seems to have gotten into almost every consumer product imaginable, it's even in our drinks and our food as "edible glitter" (Stieg, n.d.). It's terrible. It is something to be mindful of especially for a population who is so sensitive to chemicals!

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