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A:

Several unsubstantiated myths regarding microwave oven safety and use are out there on the Internet. Here's the breakdown.

Microwaved food is healthy. Nutrients are not lost through microwaving. In fact, more nutrients are retained with microwaving than other forms of cooking if you don't use a lot of water and don't overcook the food. Most vitamins are very heat-stable, but can be lost to water.

Plastic wraps are safe coverings when microwaving food. Experts maintain that

plastic wrap does not contain two substances of concern, dioxin and phthalates, nor are their precursors released during microwaving. However, since plastic wrap has not been approved by the FDA for use in microwave ovens, keep plastic wrap from touching the food while it's cooking to eliminate the chance of any chemicals migrating from the wrap into the food.

Avoid re-using recycled containers and packaging from prepared and frozen foods. They are rigorously tested and approved as safe for one use by the FDA before they can be sold, but the polymers in the packaging can start to break down during a second use in the

microwave. Do not save these containers for future microwaving.

The plastic containers and lids that you buy to store foods are safe to use in the microwave when they specifically state they are "Microwave Safe". But others, including yogurt, margarine, and dessert topping tubs, are not safe!

Microwaved food does not cause cancer. There are no published scientific studies that support this claim.

Radiation leaks that could harm your health

do not occur in well functioning, undamaged microwave ovens. Leakage can only occur if the cooking chamber, including the metal grid over the front window and the seals around the door, has holes in it. Even if there is a leak, microwaves lose intensity rapidly as they spread out. By the time they've traveled a foot or so from a small leak, they've effectively disappeared.

Bottom line: Microwaving is a safe, quick, easy and healthy way for busy people to cook or heat food.

Microwave savvy: Key things for busy students to know

Q:

Got a question? email:
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► For a good list of practical **tips for safe and effective microwaving**, go to www.fsis.usda.gov/factsheets/cooking_safely_in_the_microwave/index.asp

Adapted from "Microwave Myths", Nutrition Action Healthletter, April 2005