

# Microplastics in seafood could be a health risk, experts fear

The increasing amount of tiny plastic pieces being absorbed into the bloodstream is an urgent concern, scientists say.

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Video: Sky Ocean Rescue: Time to help save our seas

By Thomas Moore, Science Correspondent

**Seafood eaters are absorbing tiny pieces of plastic into their bloodstream with unknown effects on their health, according to research exclusively shown to Sky News.**

The plastic fragments, measuring less than a millimeter across, are widely found in mussels, oysters and other shellfish.

In the first comprehensive risk assessment of its kind, scientists calculate that more than 99% of the microplastics pass through the human body - but the rest are taken up by body tissues.



Image: Microplastics are widely found in mussels, oysters and other shellfish

Researchers from the University of Ghent in Belgium believe Europeans currently consume up to 11,000 pieces of plastic in their food each year.

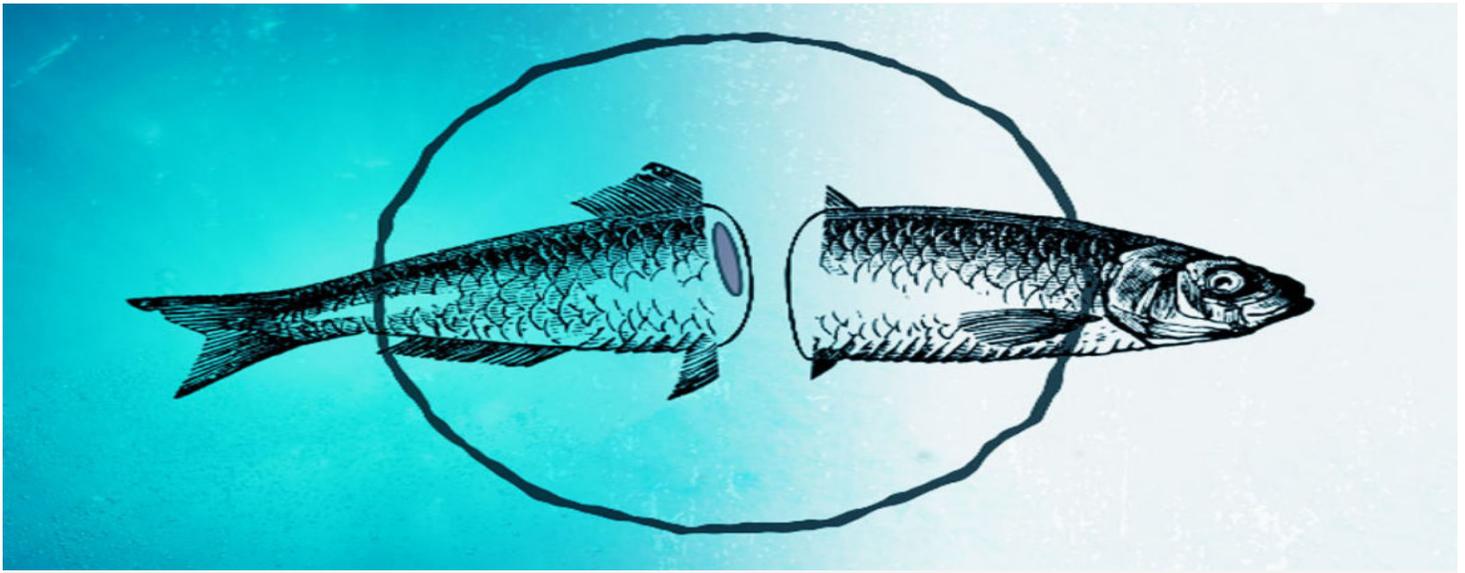
According to the unpublished studies, fewer than 60 of these are likely to be absorbed - but they will accumulate in the body over time. But the amount of plastic absorbed from our food will increase as plastic pollution in the ocean gets worse.

Dr Colin Janssen, who led the research, told Sky News the presence of plastic particles in the body was "a concern".

He said: "Now we've established that they do enter our body and can stay there for quite a while, we do need to know the fate of the plastics.

"Where do they go? Are they encapsulated by tissue and forgotten about by the body, or are they causing inflammation or doing other things?"

"Are chemicals leaching out of these plastics and then causing toxicity? We don't know and actually we do need to know."



Video: How does plastic end up inside the fish we eat?

Mussels feed by filtering around 20 litres of seawater a day, ingesting microplastics by accident.

Most are excreted, but on average each mussel contains one tiny fragment lodged in its body tissue. As plastic pollution builds up in the ocean that will increase.

By the end of the century people who regularly eat seafood could be consuming 780,000 pieces of plastic a year, absorbing 4,000 of them from their digestive systems.

Dr Janssen said: "The next generation or two generations might say they left us a rotten plastic legacy because now we are suffering in various ways from that legacy.

"We have to do something about it. We have to act now."



Video: Why should you take part in Sky Ocean Rescue?

There are more than five trillion pieces of microplastic in the world's oceans and the equivalent of one rubbish truck of plastic waste is being added to the sea every minute.

By 2050 that will increase to four trucks every minute.

The plastic in the ocean will take decades or even centuries to break down into small pieces, but many scientists believe it will never completely disappear.

Professor Richard Thompson, a marine biologist at Plymouth University, said: "Hundreds of marine organisms encounter plastic at the sea surface or in the water column, and many of those encounters are harmful if not fatal.