



# Wellness Letter

In Collaboration With **The UC Berkeley School of Public Health**

## Cookware 101—what types of pots and pans should you use?

### The Best Cookware Choices

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We think it's best to steer clear of nonstick pans. The reason? They contain harmful chemicals in their coatings that can become fumes when cooking at high temperatures and come off into your food. Instead, we suggest using stainless steel or glass, depending on the type of cooking you're doing.

ALUMINUM: Most cookware in the marketplace is aluminum-based, usually alloyed with small amounts of other metals. This relatively inexpensive and lightweight option cooks foods evenly, though it scratches easily, may stain, and can give acidic foods (such as tomato sauce) a bitter off-taste.

You may want to avoid cooking acidic foods in it, since besides the bitter taste that may occur, and this can pock the surface of the cookware

A better though more expensive option is anodized aluminum cookware, which is treated in ways that make the surface harder and more resistant to scratches, staining, leaching of aluminum, and off-flavors.

CAST IRON: This is a tried-and-true cookware option, used since ancient times. It's durable, inexpensive, and versatile—you can use it for all kinds of cooking. But cast-iron pots and pans are heavy. And some iron leaches into foods that are acidic, such as tomato sauce, which is beneficial for people who are iron-deficient but a problem for others. Cast-iron pots and pans don't always cook food evenly, and they shouldn't be put in the dishwasher, and will rust if left wet. To maintain a cast-iron pan, you have to rub oil on the surface, referred to as seasoning. A well-seasoned cast-iron pan has fairly good nonstick properties.

CERAMIC-COATED: A relative newcomer is ceramic-coated cookware, which is nonstick. The material is advertised as heat-stable and flake-resistant, and therefore free of health or environmental concerns.

COPPER: High-quality, heavy-gauge copper pots and pans have a long lifespan and heat foods evenly. But as with aluminum and iron pans, copper can leak into food, especially acidic foods, resulting in a metallic taste. The addition of small amounts of copper in the diet isn't generally a health concern. Copper cookware lined with stainless steel eliminates this problem.

GLASS: Glass is an inert material, meaning that nothing reacts with it or leaches or leaks from it. The best-known brand of glass cookware is Pyrex, introduced more than a century ago. But you have to follow instructions and heed warnings on labels, since there have been reports of some products shattering due to thermal shock.

STAINLESS STEEL: Chefs love stainless-steel cookware because it is durable, doesn't react with food, and is easy to clean. It can even be put in the dishwasher. Higher-quality stainless-steel pots and pans often have an inner core of aluminum or copper that helps food cook more uniformly. These pricier options may also have a brushed finish that makes them nonstick. Otherwise, basic stainless-steel cookware may not be completely nonstick unless a little oil or liquid is added to the food when cooking. (Of course, adding oil—but not necessarily liquid—to any cookware makes food less likely to stick.)