Maine Medical Center (MMC) has received $2.2 million from the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) to study whether certain chemicals that are commonly found in household items may be contributing to obesity in teenagers, and potentially making those teens more susceptible to osteoporosis later in life.

The study looks at the impact of perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) and phthalates on about 500 teenagers who have been enrolled since birth in Project Viva, a longitudinal research study of mothers and children in Eastern Massachusetts. PFAS are synthetic chemicals added to clothing, furniture, and carpets to make the items non-stick and stain repellant. Phthalates are added to personal care products such as shampoos and lotions to retain scents. They’re also used to improve flexibility in plastics. Studies in animals suggest that these classes of chemicals may disrupt common biological pathways to increase the risk of both high body fat and low bone mineral density.

‘MMC Grant’
Continued on Back
**MMC Grant**

*From Front*

“Adolescence is an important time when our bodies build up both bone and fat,” said principal investigator Abby Fleisch, M.D., M.P.H., a pediatric endocrinologist at MMC, faculty scientist at the Maine Medical Center Research Institute and assistant professor at Tufts University School of Medicine. “Few human studies have looked at how these chemicals in our environment could be impacting our fat accumulation and the health of our bones.”

The study will test for PFAS in samples of the teens’ blood and for phthalates in their urine. Researchers also will measure body fat and bone density using a special kind of X-ray machine. Each child filled out food questionnaires that will help the research team investigate how much of the PFAS and phthalate exposure has come from diet and how much has come from the environment.

The study is being funded as part of the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences’ Outstanding New Environmental Scientist (ONES) program. The ONES program was formed to cultivate future leaders in environmental health and support innovative research projects. The hope is that this research could lead to ways to curb obesity and osteoporosis later in life.

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**Donate Life**

*From Front*

“Donors are unique and important people,” said Ardyce Peters, director of Maine Transplant Services at MMC. “I continue to be humbled by these individuals who risk their own life for another person.”

Among those attending was Kristin Salway, who donated her kidney last year to help the son of her co-worker. She said she appreciated the event as a way to connect with others who have shared this experience. “I didn’t know anyone who’s donated an organ before,” Salway said. “It was wonderful to be able to make a connection to someone who had gone through what I did as a living donor.”

Salway said she is very glad she was able to save a life and has been active in encouraging others to donate their kidneys, too. Her husband, Paul, is hopeful that others will be inspired by her story.

“Donating an organ is more attainable than people realize,” Paul Salway said. “It can seem overwhelming, but the Maine Transplant Program did a great job taking us through every step.”

Congresswoman Chellie Pingree (D-Maine) addressed donors during the ceremony. She saw firsthand what a difference donors make when her daughter’s friend, Jessie Hallowell, found herself in need of a kidney this year. Hallowell’s brother, Sam, was able to save her life by donating his kidney.

“Many of us know little about kidney donation, and it’s hard to understand just how major a life decision it is until you’ve seen it up close,” said Congresswoman Pingree. “Watching the Hallowell family this year has brought the issue close to home for me, and I’ll continue to fight in Congress to pass legislation that will protect donors and recipients. No one who donates a kidney should have their insurance denied or their premiums increased.”

April is Donate Life Month. To begin the process to register as a living donor, visit mmc.org/living-donation.

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