The Invisible Threat: Microplastics and Their Impact on Human Health

In a world that focuses primarily on convenience and comfort rather than sustainability, it's important to discuss a hidden event to our planet—microplastics. Microplastics are often less than 5 millimetres in width and have infiltrated every aspect of the biosphere, from the bottom of the ocean and the highest mountain. Even more concerning is that fragments of microplastics exist in our body. Scientific research over the past two years has uncovered that microplastics are no longer just an environmental issue, but a direct threat to human health. As individuals uncover the effects of microplastics on their lives outside of the environment, microplastics have garnered public concern.

What Are Microplastics?

Microplastics are tiny plastic particles that come from several sources such as the degradation of larger plastic debris, microbeads in personal care products, and synthetic fibres from clothing. They are everywhere - in water, air, soil, and even in our food. Their small size allows for easy ingestion by marine life and it is then passed up the food chain to humans. But the issue doesn't end there, microplastics have also been found in human tissue including the lungs, liver, and even the placenta.

The Health Implications & the Psychological Impact on this Microplastics:

The health risks associated with microplastics are still being evaluated, however, preliminarily observed are problematic. Microplastics can transport harmful chemicals like pesticides, and other pollutants, which can leach into our bodies once ingested. Microplastics can also cause physical damage to tissues. When inhaled, they can cause irritation to the respiratory system and potentially lead to chronic inflammation and other lung diseases. Perhaps the most unsettling discovery is evidence of microplastics in the human bloodstream. A paper published in the journal Environment International created a study and observed that 80% of participants tested presented with microplastics in their blood. Therefore, this evidence suggests microplastics are not merely transient, but actually absorbed into our body through our circulatory system and potentially settled in every organ.

Beyond the physical health risks, the presence of microplastics in our bodies has a psychological impact. The idea that we are constantly ingesting and inhaling plastic particles creates a sense of helplessness and anxiety. It's a stark reminder of how deeply intertwined our lives are with plastic, a material that was once hailed as a marvel of modern science but is now a symbol of environmental degradation.

What Can We Do?

The effort to address microplastics calls for a comprehensive approach. For our individual consumption, we should limit our plastic intake where possible, choose natural fibres instead of plastics, and advocate for government interventions to prevent plastic pollution. But the scale of the problem requires systemic change. Governments, along with the industries that contribute to the microplastics issue, should financially support research aimed at studying the health implications of microplastics and develop creative solutions to remove microplastics from the environment.

Conclusion

The issue of microplastics is not simply an environmental one; it is a matter of public health. As we learn more about the impact of microplastics on human health, we are reminded that there is growing urgency to address this concern. Microplastics are an invisible threat that wakes us up to the reality that our actions today have lasting implications on the health of current and future generations. We must act now before the invisible becomes irreversible.