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# Podcasts and Plastic Spoons

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I have always enjoyed traveling to different places around Japan and although I sometimes travel via train or plane, most of the time I travel by car. It was the same when I grew up in Australia. My family would often go on extended car trips during summer vacation. We would spend most days driving to our next destination while visiting sights along the way. Of course, spending such a long time in a car can get boring, especially when you are a child. We would play word games, sing songs and of course listen to the radio. In those days, our car did not have any kind of music player and so listening to the radio was our only option for music.

When I got my own car in my early twenties, I would always listen to music when I was driving long distances. My car had a CD player and so I could play my favorite CDs and listening to music became a way to pass the time. However, about ten years ago following the introduction of smartphones, I heard about podcasts and started listening to them while driving. There are thousands of podcasts available to listen to for free using various platforms. You can listen in English, Japanese and other languages and there is a huge variety of content available. You can use a podcast to study a language, enjoy a fictional story or comedy show, find out about news and current affairs, listen to interviews with celebrities or learn something about a subject you are interested in such as history, cooking, or a sport.

My favorite podcast is called *Science Vs*. In this podcast they cover a broad range of topics and aim to investigate and explain areas of science and nature that are controversial. The podcast host and team talk to many different experts around the world and study published data to try and work out the truth about an issue. A recent edition of *Science Vs* was titled “Is There Really a Plastic Spoon in our Brains?” This followed many mainstream media outlets around the world, including in Japan, reporting that a study had found that we all have around 7g of microplastics in our brain which is equivalent to the weight of a plastic spoon. Of course that sounds very scary, right? There is no doubt that microplastics are a serious issue not only for our bodies but also for the environment. In our bodies they have been found to be linked to chemicals which can interfere and affect our hormonal system. However, is this claim really accurate? To investigate this, the *Science Vs* team talked to many prominent researchers in the field of microplastics and analyzed the research methods and results from the study in question and similar studies.. Their conclusion was that the 7g of plastic was indeed an overestimate. In the study in question, they found that the method used to identify microplastics in brain tissue samples was quite controversial as it can result in false-positive results as the presence of fat in the samples can give the same result as those for plastic. And of course, the brain is full of fat. The researchers they talked to said that the method is very problematic and should not be used in studies of microplastics as it does not result in reliable results. I must admit I was very relieved to hear the conclusion reached at the end of the podcast. It is quite possible that we do have microplastics in our body, but it is unlikely that we have enough to make a plastic spoon in our brain alone. I suppose the moral of the story is always to check information for yourself and not just believe everything you see and hear in mainstream media. In my case, I will continue to listen to *Science Vs* as I find the topics interesting and I believe the investigations they carry out can give me a better understanding of many different issues in science and the natural world.