**A Day in the Life of a Nanoconsumer**

It’s easy to look at nanotechnology as something that’s going to revolutionise the medical world and other limited aspects of our lives, but not so far in the future it could become deeply integrated into our daily lives, from the gadgets we use to the foods we eat. Here is a brief look at the ways nanotechnology could soon become part of our everyday lives:

‘I wake up and brush my teeth. Nanoparticles in the toothpaste help combat tooth decay. I then go to get some milk out of the fridge. Nanoparticles in the bottle have changed colour to show me the milk has gone off. I open another bottle instead. I’m soon on the way to work. My car runs on biofuel created by processes using nanotechnology. Nanoclusters in the engine burn fuel more efficiently, increasing mileage and reducing air pollution. At work I log onto the computer. Computers use nanotechnology to make them smaller, faster and more power efficient. Solar panels on the office roof are made more efficient by nanotechnology and power the entire office. When I spill coffee on my shirt, nanowhiskers in fabric cause the water to bead up, and it is simply cleaned off with a cloth. No stains, disaster averted.’

These are just a small number of the products being developed. But as incredible as the possibilities are, there are serious risks to be considered. The effects of many nanoparticles aren’t properly understood. What if 20 years down the line people develop serious medical problems because of toxic nanoparticles from packaging which contaminated their food? At that stage, it would be too late – the particles would be undetectable. The nanoscale is an environment only just being explored. The most harmless of elements could be highly toxic or even explosive on the nanoscale. As much as we may want to reap the benefits of these technologies as soon as possible, I think we must tread carefully to avoid a disaster later on.

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