

SUSTAINABLE LIVING GUIDE:

81. TOP TEN FOOD ADDITIVES TO AVOID¹

Dr. Mercola[©]

Some food additives are worse than others. Food Matters² suggests these as the top ones to avoid:

- (1) **Aspartame.** also known as Nutrasweet and Equal, is believed to be carcinogenic and accounts for more reports of adverse reactions than all other foods and food additives combined. The artificial sweetener Acesulfame-K has been linked to kidney tumors. All artificial sweeteners are bad news.
- (2) **High Fructose Corn Syrup.** High fructose corn syrup (HFCS) increases your LDL ("bad") cholesterol levels and contributes to the development of diabetes.
- (3) **Monosodium Glutamate (MSG).** MSG is used as a flavor enhancer. It is an excitotoxin, a substance that overexcites cells to the point of damage or death.
- (4) **Trans Fat.** Numerous studies show that trans fat increases LDL cholesterol levels and increases your risk of heart attacks, heart disease and strokes.
- (5) **Common Food Dyes.** Artificial colorings may contribute to behavioral problems in children and lead to a significant reduction in IQ.
- (6) **Sodium Sulphite.** This is a preservative used in processed foods. People who are sulfite sensitive can experience headaches, breathing problems, and rashes. In severe cases, sulfites can actually cause death.
- (7) **Sodium Nitrate/Sodium Nitrite.** This common preservative has been linked to various types of cancer.
- (8) **BHA and BHT.** Butylated hydroxyanisole (BHA) and butylated hydroxytoluene (BHT) are preservatives that affect the neurological system of your brain, alter behavior and have the potential to cause cancer.
- (9) **Sulphur Dioxide.** Sulphur additives are toxic and in the U.S., they have been prohibited in raw fruit and vegetables. Adverse reactions include bronchial problems, low blood pressure, and anaphylactic shock.
- (10) **Potassium Bromate.** This additive is used to increase volume in some breads. It is known to cause cancer in animals, and even small amounts can create problems for humans.

Comments

If you've ever read the ingredients lists on packaged foods, you know that there's a lot more in food these days than in generations past. Virtually every processed food now contains a laundry list of preservatives, colorings, flavorings, emulsifiers and more -- and unless you're shopping at a natural specialty store, gone are the days when a loaf of bread contained just a few ingredients. A food additive refers to virtually any substance added to a food, but according to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) definition, a food additive is "any substance the intended use of which results or may reasonably be expected to result -- directly or indirectly -- in its becoming a component or otherwise affecting the characteristics of any food." There are currently **more than 3,000 food additives** added to foods in the United States; ideally, you should steer clear

¹ Mercola.com, December 17, 2010

² Food Matters November 24, 2010

of all or most of these, but if you're just getting started the 10 listed above are an excellent starting point of additives to remove from your diet as soon as possible.

What are You Really Eating?

When you purchase a package of cheese, you expect it to contain milk and salt ... bread you'd expect to contain flour, yeast, etc., and when you pick up a can of beans, you may think it only contains beans. In reality, cheese is commonly laced with preservatives and colorings. Bread contains high fructose corn syrup, preservatives and sometimes trans fats. And even canned beans typically contain a slew of additives including corn syrup, coloring and other sweeteners, along with being packaged in a can that probably leaches BPA from its lining. The fact is, if you're like most Americans who spend 90 percent of their food budget on processed foods, you're eating your share of these additives and then some ... which is concerning when you begin to look into their potential effect on your health:

- **Cancer:** Additives linked to cancer -- BHA/BHT, propyl gallate, trans fats, aspartame, blue 1,2, Yellow 6, potassium bromate and more -- are in countless products from baked goods and chewing gum to chicken soup base, cereal, luncheon meats, vegetable oils and potato chips. If you eat a highly processed food diet, you are therefore potentially exposing yourself to cancer-causing toxins at every meal.
- **Hormone disrupters:** An analysis published in the journal *Chemical Research in Toxicology* found 31 potential estrogen-mimicking food additives during their research. These include propyl gallate, a preservative used to prevent fats and oils from spoiling, and 4-hexylresorcinol, which is used to prevent discoloration in shrimp and other shellfish. Chemicals with estrogen-like effects, known as xenoestrogens, have been linked to a range of human health problems, including reduced sperm counts and increased risk of breast cancer.
- **Behavior Problems:** A carefully designed, randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled study published in the journal *The Lancet* concluded that a variety of common food dyes, and the preservative sodium benzoate -- found in many soft drinks, fruit juices and salad dressings -- cause some children to become measurably more hyperactive and distractible.
- **Lower IQ:** The *Lancet* study mentioned above also found that the E-numbered food dyes (such as tartrazine (E102), ponceau 4R (E124), sunset yellow (E110), carmoisine (E122), quinoline yellow (E104) and allura red AC (E129)) do as much damage to children's brains as lead in gasoline, resulting in a significant reduction in IQ.

Processed Foods Depend on Additives

When foods are processed not only are valuable nutrients lost and fibers removed, but the texture, natural variation and flavors are lost also. After processing, what's actually left behind is a bland, uninteresting "pseudo-food" that most people would find entirely unappetizing. So at this point, food manufacturers must add back in the nutrients, flavor, color and texture to processed foods in order to make them palatable, and this is why they become loaded with food additives. Most commonly, additives are included to:

- slow spoilage;
- prevent fats and oils from becoming rancid or developing an off-flavor;
- prevent cut fruits from turning brown;

- fortify or enrich the food with synthetic vitamins and minerals (which are lost during processing); and
- improve taste, texture and appearance.

When reading product packages, here's a breakdown of some of the most common food additives to watch out for:

- **Preservatives (sodium benzoate, sodium nitrite, potassium sorbate, BHA, BHT, etc.):** Found in fruit sauces and jellies, beverages, baked goods, cured meats, oils and margarines, cereals, dressings, snack foods, fruits and vegetables
- **Sweeteners and artificial sweeteners (fructose, high fructose corn syrup, aspartame, sucralose, acesulfame potassium (acesulfame-K), etc.):** Beverages, baked goods, confections, table-top sugar, substitutes, many processed foods
- **Artificial colors (FD&C Blue Nos. 1 and 2, FD&C Green No. 3, FD&C Red Nos. 3 and 40, FD&C Yellow Nos. 5 and 6, Orange B, Citrus Red No. 2, etc.):** Many processed foods (candies, snack foods, margarine, cheese, soft drinks, jams/jellies, gelatins, pudding and pie fillings)
- **Artificial flavors:** Pudding and pie fillings, gelatin dessert mixes, cake mixes, salad dressings, candies, soft drinks, ice cream, BBQ sauce, etc.
- **Flavor enhancers (monosodium glutamate (MSG), hydrolyzed soy protein, autolyzed yeast extract, etc.):** Many processed foods

The Simplest Way to Avoid Food Additives?

Ditch processed foods. You might already know that 90 percent of the money Americans spend on food is for processed foods so there is massive room for improvement in this area for most of us. Swapping your processed food diet for one that focuses on real, whole foods may seem like a radical idea, but it's a necessity if you value your health. And when you put the history of food into perspective, it's actually the processed foods that are "radical" and "new." People have thrived on vegetables, meats, eggs, fruits and other whole foods for centuries, while processed foods were only recently invented.

It's easy to forget that the processed, packaged foods and fast food restaurants of today are actually a radical change in terms of the history of food production. The frozen food business didn't begin until the mid-1920s when the General Seafoods Company set up shop and began selling crudely frozen fish fillets, and fast food restaurants didn't get a foot hold until after World War II. TV dinners didn't even come around until the 1950s ... before that it was a home-cooked meal or no meal at all.

If you want to eat healthy, I suggest you follow the 1950s (and before) model and spend quality time in the kitchen (yourself, a family member or someone you hire) preparing high-quality meals for yourself and your family. If you rely on processed inexpensive foods you will simply exchange convenience and short-term cash savings for long-term health miseries. For a step-by-step guide to make this a reality in your own life, simply follow the advice in my optimized nutrition plan along with these seven steps to wean yourself off processed foods. When it comes to staying healthy, avoiding processed foods and replacing them with fresh, whole foods is the "secret" you've been looking for.

