

LABEL LOOKOUT

(Information taken from *A Consumer's Dictionary of Food Additives* by Ruth Winter, M.S.)

When choosing foods to buy, here's a list of ingredients to look out for and why you want to be careful.

Artificial Colors

FD&C Colors (Food Drug and Cosmetic Colors) are a wide variety of artificial colors used to color food (as well as drugs and cosmetics). Colors are typically a derivative of coal tar, a thick liquid or semi-solid tar obtained from coal. Main concern about coal tar derivatives is that they cause cancer in animals as well as allergic reactions. They are found primarily in processed foods (candy, confections, cereals, puddings, jelly, hot dogs, imitation foods, condiments, soft drinks, etc.).

- FD&C blue no. 1/FD&C blue no. 2
- FD&C citrus red no. 2
- FD&C green no. 3
- FD&C red no. 2 (in Canada and Europe ONLY)/FD&C red no. 3/FD&C red no. 40
- FD&C violet no. 1
- FD&C yellow no. 5/FD&C yellow no. 6

Although all colors are permanently listed for use in foods and drugs with the FDA, their safety is not fully proven (inconclusive data).

Artificial Flavors/Flavor Enhancers

There are approximately 1500 synthetic flavorings added to foods. Most often food labels say "artificial flavors" rather than listing the individual synthetic flavorings (because they are typically flavoring compounds that are proprietary "recipes"). Flavor enhancers, such as Monosodium Glutamate (MSG), common in Chinese food and many processed soups and sauces, can cause headaches, chest pain and numbness. Although MSG is on the list of additives needing further study it is still considered Generally Recognized as Safe (GRAS) by the FDA. Just as MSG is GRAS, so are all of the 1500 synthetic flavorings.

Artificial sweeteners refer to a group of non-nutritive, low-calorie sweeteners all with individual properties and concerns (see article in Articles of Interest on subject).

Included are:

- Aspartame
- Acesulfame K
- Neotame
- Sucralose (Splenda)
- Saccharin
- Sugar alcohols (sorbitol, xylitol, mannitol...)
- Tagatose

High Fructose Corn Syrup

Also called dextrose, this sugar is a sweet syrup derived from corn and highly processed. It most commonly comes from genetically modified corn and is cheaper than natural sugar. It's contained in large amounts in processed food and thought to contribute to the obesity epidemic in our country.

Preservatives

Preservatives, unless natural (such as vinegar, citrus and salt), are synthetic chemicals used to preserve food and beverages. Generally Recognized as Safe (GRAS) by the FDA, these substances do not need pre-market approval:

- Calcium Propionate
- Disodium EDTA
- Nitrates/Nitrites
- Potassium Benzoate
- Potassium Sorbate
- Sulfur Dioxide
- Sodium Propionate

Trans-Fat

Also called hydrogenated oil, trans fat is liquid oil made partially solid by adding hydrogen gas under high pressure to liquid oils. Trans fat is cheap and increases the shelf life of food (which is why the processed food industry loves it) yet, it has been found to greatly contribute to raising the levels of fat in the blood thus raising cholesterol.

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