

Hazards in the Home

Food - Additives

According to the Food Commission there are about 4,000 additives permitted in foods in the UK, but only about 350 are ever specified on the label.¹

The additives and E numbers found to be harmful ten years ago are still put in our foods but under different names. Some additives are safe. Some cause rare but extreme allergies. Others are generally associated with hyperactivity, irritability and other behavioural problems particularly in children.

All refined foods contain additives. They are put in to replace lost flavour and to extend the shelf life of a product. Even substances essential to the diet such as salt are added in excessive amounts.

Many cereals, such as Cornflakes and Rice Crispies, are high in salt. They are made to appeal to children, are packed full of sugar and low in fibre. The food manufacturers have realised, the cheapest ways of turning something over-refined into something tasty is to add sugar and salt.²

The following additives have been linked to health problems:

- **Colours:** added just to make food look nice. Azo dyes: E102, E104, E107, E110, E122, E123, E124, E127, E128, E129, E131, E132, E133, E142, E151, E154, E155. Cochineal: E120. Caramel: E150. Annatto: E160(b). Canthaxanthin: E161(g)
- **Emulsifiers & thickeners:** Carrageenan: E407, Tragacanth gum: E413
- **Preservatives & antioxidants:** These are used to stop food going off. Potassium sorbate: E200-213 is suspected of causing allergic reactions, gastric irritations and problems with conception in some people. Others to watch out for - Benzoate: E210-E219. Sulphite: E220-E228. Nitrites: E249-262 Gallates: E310-312. BHA, BHT: E320, E321. Also: E230-233.
- **Sweeteners:** Such as aspartame, saccharin (which has to carry a health warning in the US as it has been linked to the development of bladder cancer in laboratory animals² or xylitol, are chemicals which mimic the taste of sugar. E950, E951, E952, E954.
- **Flavourings:** There are over 3,000 different flavourings in use, but their composition is often a closely guarded commercial secret, so we don't really know what they are, or even if they are safe.¹
- **Salt:** A high-salt diet can cause high blood pressure, heart attacks and kidney failure and has even been linked to stomach cancer, asthma and osteoporosis.

Practical things you can do

It is far better to buy whole foods and cook your own, but we all eat processed food sometime, so the best advice is not to eat too much of it.

Most of us should be aiming to cut down on our consumption of sugars, fats (especially saturated fats) and sodium (salt), and increase the amount of fibre we eat.

Read the label: Ingredients, including additives, must be listed in descending order or weight.

Eat more wholefoods. These are simply foods that have not been refined, prepared or processed.

A diet with plenty of fresh vegetables and fruit is by far the best protection against diet-related disease.¹

Contacts

- Organic Direct deliver organic fruit and veg to your door - 707 6949
- Liverpool's Farmers' Market, London Road, 1st & 3rd Saturday in the month - get there early.
- SUMA - Wholefood co-operative - cheap bulk buy, 01422 345513.
- Rice Lane City Farm - 530 1066.
- To get an allotment ring Liverpool City Council - 233 3000.

Sources of Information

1. The Food Commission (UK) Ltd, 020 7837 2250, www.foodcomm.org.uk
2. Ethical Consumer Magazine (issues 42&63). www.ethicalconsumer.org



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