

ARTIFICIAL ADDITIVES IN FOOD

Many artificial ingredients are used in foods as preservatives or to change the taste or texture of a food. There is evidence that artificial additives may increase hyperactivity in children (food dyes), increase risk of cardiovascular disease (trans fats), or increase risk of cancer (benzene, which forms when sodium benzoate reacts with vitamin C, commonly found together in processed foods and beverages). There is not definitive evidence that all artificial additives are harmful; however common sense suggests that eating whole, real unprocessed foods, as close as possible to their form found in nature, is more healthful and satisfying.

The best way to avoid artificial additives is to eat real, whole, unprocessed foods as much as possible. A few of the more common artificial additives found in foods include sodium benzoate, ascorbic/citric acid, potassium sorbate, carrageenan, MSG, added colors and flavors, mono- and diglycerides, azodicarbamide, hydrogenated oils, high fructose corn syrup, aspartame, sucralose, sodium nitrate/sodium nitrite, BHA/BHT, sulfur dioxide, and potassium bromate, but there are literally hundreds more! As a general rule, if you can't pronounce it, it's probably artificial.

GENETICALLY MODIFIED ORGANISMS (GMOS)

GMOs are plants or animals whose DNA has been altered with genetic material from another organism (bacteria, virus, plant, or animal) to achieve a desired trait. They were first introduced into the US food system in 1994. Today more than 90% of all conventional (non-organic) soy, corn, and canola grown in the United States is GMO.

Producers and sellers of GMO foods say that there is no evidence that GMOs are unsafe. However, there has never been a long-term study in humans assessing the safety to GMOs, so it is impossible to say definitively that they are safe. (In 1960, 1 out of 3 physicians believed there was no evidence that cigarette smoking was harmful!)

The most common trait introduced through genetic modification of plants is resistance to Round-Up, a toxic herbicide used to kill weeds. This allows farmers to spray entire fields of GMO crops, killing the weeds without killing the harvest. It is argued that Round-up has a short half life and that herbicide residual is not detectable on produce, but this point has been debated. If you chose to try to minimize your exposure to GMOs, follow these guidelines:

- When eating soy, corn, or canola, chose USDA certified organic, which, by law, cannot contain GMOs.
- Chose USDA organic meat (which by law cannot have been fed GMO grain).
- Look for the "Non-GMO Project Verified" seal on processed foods.
- Avoid the following foods that likely contain GMOs: conventional (not USDA organic) soy, corn, canola, beet sugar, tomatoes, zucchini, papaya and farm raised salmon.

