

[IMAGE]

Food Additives

What You Don't Know May Hurt You

By Christine H. Farlow, DC

Every day we are bombarded with ads on TV, radio and in magazines and newspapers trying to sell us the latest and greatest processed cuisine and "fake" foods. The ads promote great taste, low fat, added nutrients, attractive appearance and a host of other reasons to choose their product. There are even chemical concoctions marketed as better than real food, such as egg replacer products, nondairy dairy foods, fake meats and cheeses, and butter substitutes.

Are these products really good for you? You've undoubtedly heard it before, but it's worth repeating: To determine the healthfulness of any product on the market, you must first read the label. Note the information on the front of the package. That's what the manufacturer wants you to believe about the product.

Manufacturers use terms like *healthy* and *natural* on the packaging even when the product is far from healthy or natural. These terms are undefined by the food industry; that means manufacturers can use them to mean anything they want.

The ingredients list is the most important area to read on every food package before you decide to purchase the product. Frequently, you'll have difficulty finding the ingredients list, and when you find it, you'll discover it's in a very tiny print and in a color that blends in with the packaging, making it very difficult to read. That's not just an accident. This is the information many food manufacturers *don't* want you to read. They make it difficult so only the most dedicated label readers will follow through and actually read what's in their product. The solution: Get a magnifying glass and carry it with you when you shop. Unless you're really good at reading the very tiny print, you'll probably need it.

- Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark Why do you need to be a dedicated reader of the ingredients list? Because virtually all foods that are packaged in any way - in a bag, box, bottle, jar or can - contain food additives. Food additives are chemicals added to processed foods, most with little nutritional value, to make them look good, taste good, give them an appealing consistency or texture, and give them a long shelf life so they can sit on the grocery store shelf for a year (or more) and still taste fresh when you get around to eating

them. Nearly all foods that have been through some form of processing contain food additives.

Preservatives are chemical additives used not only in foods to keep them fresh, but also in many nutritional supplements and over-the-counter (OTC) and prescription medications. These chemicals can cause a wide variety of adverse effects. Two particularly troublesome additives that are widely used are aspartame and MSG.

The Big Two: Aspartame and MSG

Aspartame, also known as Equal, NutraSweet or Spoonful, is an artificial sweetener used in many diet beverages, sugar-free foods, gum, candy, OTC medications, nutritional supplements and certain prescription drugs. Consumption of products containing aspartame has been associated with 92 different adverse reactions, from headaches, dizziness and difficulty breathing to memory loss, seizures and death. If a product label says the product contains phenylalanine or has a warning that phenylketonurics should not use it, the product most likely contains aspartame. (Phenylketonuria is an inherited metabolic disorder caused by an enzyme deficiency, resulting in the buildup of phenylalanine and its metabolites in the blood. This can lead to severe mental retardation and seizures unless phenylalanine is restricted from the diet, starting at birth.)

MSG is in almost all processed foods and most restaurant meals. It's even in some foods that say "No MSG" or "No Added MSG." Even some restaurants that say they do not use MSG have it in their food, and they may not even be aware of it.

How is this possible? MSG stands for *monosodium glutamate*. It's the glutamate component that's the problem. Processed free glutamic acid, which is often referred to as MSG, is formed during the manufacturing of processed foods. It is not the same as glutamic acid, which is a component of protein. Processed free glutamic acid occurs only as a result of the manufacturing process. It's a neurotoxin (i.e., it is toxic to the nervous system), and can cause a wide range of symptoms, including skin rashes, tachycardia (rapid heartbeat), migraine headaches, depression and seizures. In addition, MSG is addictive - it makes you want to keep eating. It's a contributing factor to the obesity epidemic.

MSG can be hidden in a variety of ingredients you wouldn't expect to contain MSG. For example, certain ingredients that *always* contain MSG include amino acids, autolyzed yeast, calcium caseinate, gelatin, any kind of hydrolyzed protein, textured protein and yeast extract.

Some of the ingredients that may contain MSG include barley malt, boullion, broth, stock, carrageenan, any kind of flavors or flavoring including natural flavors, maltodextrin, any kind of protein such as soy protein, plant protein, pea protein, corn protein, whey protein, anything that is protein fortified, protein concentrates and protein isolates, seasonings, and anything that is ultra-pasteurized.

Both aspartame and MSG are excitotoxins. They cross the blood-brain barrier and excite your brain cells to death. Like aspartame, MSG is not only in food. It can also be found in cosmetics and personal care products, nutritional supplements, OTC and prescription medications, and even the chicken pox vaccine.

Of particular concern is the fact that many of the food additives in the foods you eat every day have never been fully tested for safety. Often, no testing has been done to determine if the chemicals being added to our food may cause cancer, DNA damage, birth defects or reproductive disorders.

Also, additives are not tested for the potential combined effects of multiple additives in a single product or several products being consumed at the same time. A good example of this is sodium benzoate. Recently, it was discovered that in products containing both sodium benzoate and vitamin C, these ingredients can react and cause the formation of benzene. A number of beverages, containing both sodium benzoate and vitamin C, were tested. In many of these products, benzene was detected. Benzene is known to cause cancer; sodium benzoate is a common preservative used in beverages and liquid nutritional supplements.

This is only the tip of the iceberg. There are more than 3,000 different chemicals purposefully added to our food, and new ingredients are added every year. Here's a general rule of thumb when checking ingredients on food labels: If the list of ingredients is long, there are probably a lot of chemical additives in the product, and you're risking your health by eating it. If the list of ingredients is short, it may or may not contain harmful additives, so you need to read the label carefully before you purchase it. That's the most important point: Be an informed shopper. Look at what you're buying before you and your family eat it. Your health is that important.

10 Other Food Additives to Avoid

1 Artificial Sweeteners Splenda or Sucralose, Acesulfame-K (also known as Acesulfame-potassium or Sunette) and Saccharin. Splenda is chlorinated sugar, although it can be made chemically without any sugar at all. Contrary to manufacturers' claims, it is partially absorbed and metabolized in the body. Recent independent studies have shown a strong relationship between Splenda and migraine headaches.

Acesulfame-K has caused cancer in lab animals. It has not been adequately tested.

2 Saccharin was once banned as a carcinogen, but was delisted in 1997 due to industry pressure. Studies still show that it may cause cancer. Artificial sweeteners, in general, have been linked to weight gain.

3 Ingredients derived from corn, soy, canola or cottonseed If they are not organic, these ingredients are probably genetically modified. In the U.S., 60-70 percent of the food on the grocery store shelves contains genetically modified ingredients. Genetically modified ingredients are not required to be labeled in the U.S., and it's not likely it will be required in the near future.

- Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark **4** Hydrogenated or partially hydrogenated oils If the label says "No Trans Fats," check the ingredients to make sure there are no partially hydrogenated oils. It is legal to say "No Tans Fats" if there is less than 0.5 grams per serving. However, what's listed as a serving size on the label is often less than one might eat in a single serving. So the amount of trans fat consumed would be more than the 0.5 grams. More importantly, though, is that no amount of trans fat is safe.

5 Artificial colors or FD&C colors Most are derived from coal tar, which is a known carcinogen. They must be certified by the FDA not to contain more than 10 ppm of lead and arsenic. Certification does not address any harmful effects these colors may have on the body. They may contain carcinogenic contaminants and cause allergic reactions.

6 Olestra or Olean This "fake fat" robs the body of carotenoids and fat- soluble vitamins. It required a warning on the label until 2003 because of the severe gastrointestinal symptoms which may occur after ingesting. However, the FDA relaxed the requirement for a warning label based upon industry-sponsored studies and stated that "most consumers are aware of the fat substitute's potentially adverse gastrointestinal effects."

- Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark **7** Nitrates and nitrites They are mostly in processed meats. The FDA knows nitrates and nitrites cause cancer, but allows them because they prevent botulism. They can also cause headaches and dizziness. Carrageenan Also known as Irish Moss. There are two forms of carrageenan that are important here. Native carrageenan and degraded carrageenan. Native carrageenan has not caused cancer in lab animals, but there is not enough data available yet to determine whether it is carcinogenic to humans. Degraded carrageenan has caused cancer in lab animals and is classified as a possible human carcinogen by the International Agency for Research on Cancer. According to renowned carrageenan

researcher Dr. Joanne Tobacman, native carrageenan can be broken down in the stomach to the degraded form. Carrageenan is also a possible source of hidden MSG.

8 BHA and BHT Widely used antioxidants. BHA is also a preservative. BHA can cause liver and kidney damage, behavioral problems, infertility, weakened immune system and is classified as a possible carcinogen by the International Agency for Research on Cancer. BHT cannot be evaluated for its ability to cause cancer because of a lack of data. The studies just haven't been done. BHT has been banned in several countries, but not in the U.S.

- Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark **9** Caffeine It's addictive and may cause headaches, irritability, nervousness, and fertility problems. It increases the risk of miscarriage, birth defects, low birth weight, heart disease, behavioral changes, insomnia. There is not enough data available to determine if it can cause cancer in humans. It's in energy drinks which contain as much or more caffeine than a cup of coffee. These beverages are sold at middle schools and high schools, and kids are drinking multiple cans a day.

10 Potassium bromate Used mostly in bread and baked goods to give them a sponge-like quality. It's a possible carcinogen and can cause nervous system issues, kidney disorders and gastrointestinal upset. Banned worldwide, except for the U.S. and Japan.

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