

Common Food Additives

Name	Function	Health Effects
Acesulfame-K	Artificial sweetener	Causes cancer and thyroid problems in laboratory animals
Agar	Gelling agent extracted from seaweed	Non-toxic
Artificial Colour	Used to entice the consumer	Synthetic chemicals with no nutritive value. Disguises lack of nutritious ingredients and may cause hyperactivity in children
Artificial or Natural Flavour	Used to mimic certain flavours/tastes	Synthetic chemicals with no nutritive value. Favourings may include ingredients such as MSG
Aspartame (Nutra Sweet or Equal)	Artificial sweetener	Linked to cancer and migraines
Autolyzed Yeast	Flavour enhancer	Contains glutamate (see MSG)
Benzoic Acid	Preservative	See Sodium Benzoate
BHA or BHT	Preservative	Carcinogenic. Test done on rats showed elevated cholesterol levels, hair falling out and some born without eyes
Caffeine	Stimulant	Addictive drug. May cause insomnia, nervousness, headaches and increases risk of miscarriage or birth defects
Carrageenan	Thickener – extracted from seaweed	Non-toxic
Citric Acid	Prevents discolouration	Non-toxic
Dextrose	Sweetener	Form of sugar
Disodium EDTA	Preservative	Tests on humans resulted in kidney damage, GI distress and vitamin/mineral imbalances
Gums (cellulose, xanthan)	Stabilizer	May cause diarrhea or constipation
High-Fructose Corn Syrup	Sweetener	Form of sugar
Hydrolyzed Vegetable Protein (HVP)	Flavour enhancer	Contains glutamate (see MSG)

Name	Function	Health Effects
Modified Food Starch	Stabilizer	Difficult to digest. May elevate blood cholesterol levels
Mono and Di-Glycerides	Emulsifier	May cause cancer, birth defects
MSG (monosodium glutamate)	Flavour enhancer	Contains glutamate which may cause headaches, nausea, tightness of chest. Animal testing revealed brain damage
Partially Hydrogenated Vegetable Oil	Fat choice with increased product shelf-life	Contains trans fats which increase risk of heart disease and cancer
Propyl Gallate	Preservative	May cause birth defects, liver damage
Propylene Glycol (alginate)	Stabilizer	Substances in this additive are used for anti-freeze, waxes
Saccharin	Sweetener	May be cancer-causing
Sodium Benzoate	Preservative	May cause hives, asthma; affect behaviour in children (particularly with ADD/ADHD); linked to cancer when used with ascorbic acid (vitamin C)
Sodium Phosphates	Buffering agent/ discolouration inhibitor	Also sold as an enema/laxative. Excessive amounts of phosphates in the diet contribute to bone loss
Sodium Nitrate or Nitrite	Preservative	Disguises age and poor quality of meat. Cancer causing
Sucralose (Splenda)	Artificial sweetener	Synthetic chemical made of sugar (sucrose) and chlorine
Sucrose (sugar)	Sweetener	Refined sugars promote obesity, tooth decay. Suppresses the immune system
Sulfites (Sulfur Dioxide, Sodium Bisulfite)	Preservative	May cause headaches, nausea, dizziness, cramps, wheezing, death
Tartrazine (or FD&C Yellow 5)	Colourant	May cause allergic reactions, primarily in aspirin-sensitive persons; Banned in some countries
Yeast Extract	Flavour enhancer	Contains glutamate (see MSG)

Type of Ingredient	Purpose	Common Uses
Preservatives	Prevents food spoilage from moulds, bacteria, fungi, or yeast; slows or prevents changes in colour, flavour or texture and delays rancidity	Fruit sauces and jellies, beverages, baked goods, cured meats, oils and margarines, cereals, dressings, snack foods and dried fruits
Colour additives	Offsets colour loss due to exposure to light, air, temperature changes or moisture; enhances colours that occur naturally; provide colour to colourless and "fun" foods	Candies, snack foods, margarine, cheese, soft drinks, jams, gelatins, puddings and pie fillings
Sweeteners	Adds sweetness with or without the extra calories	Beverages, baked goods, confections, sugar substitutes and many processed foods
Flavours/spices	Adds specific flavours (natural and synthetic)	Pudding and pie fillings, gelatin mixes, cake mixes, dressings, candies, soft drinks, ice cream, BBQ sauce
Flavour enhancers	Enhance flavours already present in foods (without providing their own separate flavour)	Many processed foods
Emulsifiers	Keeps emulsified products stable, prevents separation, reduces stickiness and helps products dissolve more easily	Salad dressings, peanut butter, chocolate, margarine, frozen dessert
Fat replacers	Provides expected texture and a creamy "mouth-feel" in reduced-fat foods	Baked goods, dressings, frozen desserts, confections, cake and dessert mixes, dairy products
Thickeners	Produces uniform texture, improves "mouth-feel"	Frozen desserts, dairy products, cakes, pudding and gelatin mixes, dressings, jams and jellies, sauces
Leavening agents	Promotes rising of baked goods	Breads and other baked goods
Buffering agents	Controls acidity and alkalinity, prevents spoilage	Beverages, frozen desserts, chocolate, low acid canned foods, baking powder
Anti-caking agents	Keeps powdered foods free-flowing, prevents moisture absorption	Table salt, baking powder, confectioner's sugar