

# Bad Chemistry

Avoid these three common preservatives, additives and mystery ingredients

Take a look at whatever box, bottle, jar or can you've got in your kitchen and you'll notice starbursts around the phrases "High in vitamin C!" or "New and improved texture!" or "High in flavor, not in calories!" Sounds promising, doesn't it? One look at the ingredient list under the Nutrition Facts label, however, and that feel-good sensation of eating right is lost, isn't it? Chances are, if you can't pronounce a 12-syllable word with more consonants than a gym has dumbbells, it's not likely to be a great ingredient that you should be consuming with any regularity.

"Even when chemical additives are approved for consumption by the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA), it's still important to be aware of what you're putting into your body," says Heather Mangieri, a sports

## How certain are you that your body can handle the additives and preservatives in your food?

dietitian and spokesperson for the American Dietetic Association. "Typically, the more ingredients on the list, the more processed—and less nutritionally sound—the product is."

Here are three common chemical additives that you'll want to drop from your diet.

### ACESULFAME POTASSIUM (ACESULFAME-K)

**FOUND IN** Processed baked goods, diet soft drinks, chewing gum and gelatin desserts.

**USED AS** A calorie-free artificial sweetener that is 200 times sweeter than sugar and often blended with other artificial sweeteners, such as aspartame and sucralose.

**WHY IT'S BAD** Although approved by the FDA, researchers at the Center for Science in the Public Interest petitioned against its approval, citing that the

only two studies done in the 1970s to test for carcinogenesis were "seriously flawed" and that further studies should be run to ensure its safety.

**TRY INSTEAD** "Drink water with lemon or a splash of cranberry juice instead of diet soda," says Mangieri. "And if you want dessert, go for it, but bake it at home—and only a small amount. You'll be surprised at how satisfied you'll be with a few bites of the real thing."

### ASPARTAME

**FOUND IN** More than 6,000 low-calorie or sugar-free products, including diet soft drinks, cereals, frozen desserts, yogurt, ketchup, tabletop sweeteners, sports nutrition bars, meal-replacement shakes and some pharmaceuticals, such as vitamins and sugar-free cough drops.

**USED AS** A calorie-free artificial sweetener that is 100 to 150 times sweeter than sugar.

**WHY IT'S BAD** A recent study by Italian scientists suggests that doses of 20 milligrams per kilogram of body weight can cause lymphoma and leukemia. "Other side effects, such as headaches, joint problems and disturbed cognitive function, have been widely reported, but further research is needed to prove the relationship," says Mangieri.

**TRY INSTEAD** "Your diet should include very few 'diet' foods, which aren't usually very nutritionally sound," says Mangieri. Instead, satisfy your inevitable sweet cravings with small portions of the real thing.

Could extra ketchup result in lymphoma?

### ASCORBIC ACID

**FOUND IN** Light orange juice, frozen desserts, hot dogs, bologna, sports nutrition bars and supplements.

**USED AS** A synthetic (but reduced) form of natural vitamin C that's used to boost vitamin content and maintain the color of processed meats.

**WHY IT'S BAD** Although it's safe, it's neither nutritionally or structurally identical to natural vitamin C, which also contains vitamins J, K and P and an enzyme known as tyrosinase. Yet, it counts toward your recommended daily allowance (RDA). Excessive doses of vitamin C (2,000 milligrams per day) are deemed adverse and can cause side effects, such as osmotic diarrhea (a type of gastrointestinal distress that could require professional diagnosis and care).

**TRY INSTEAD** A variety of colorful fruits and vegetables to meet the RDA of 90 milligrams a day. "To give you some perspective, a single bell pepper has 95 milligrams of vitamin C," says Mangieri. **MF**

—Chris Cander

