

## Food Additives & Children

You may have seen a lot of press recently regarding artificial additives and their use in products consumed by children.

Recently, the European Parliament voted in favour of labelling foods containing the six food colours E110, E104, E122, E129, E102 and E124 with the words "may have an adverse effect on activity and attention in children." This change was made following the evidence generated by research that was commissioned by the UK Food Standards Agency, published in September 2007.

Awareness of the risks posed to children by these and other artificial additives is not new and the use of three of these artificial colours (E104, E122 and E124) has been restricted in Australia and banned in the United States and Canada. There have been numerous studies and much conjecture around the world about how artificial food additives affect children's behaviour. Some studies have shown that certain additives have an effect on behaviours associated with ADHD and attentiveness. Whilst some experts don't believe there is sufficient evidence to support banning suspect additives from food, there are many more who do and just as importantly, many parents who have seen the effects some foods have on their child.

With differing opinions regarding which additives are acceptable and at what level, parents and carers could be forgiven for being confused about food additives and the effects these might have on their child's behaviour. Add to this dilemma public debate about organic and genetically modified foods and the effect of rising food costs and confusion can easily change to indifference.

So what really matters when it comes to additives in the food we give our children?

Each child is known best by his or her parents or carers and this knowledge along with personal beliefs are what guide food purchases. We all know how important good nutrition is for the health and wellbeing of our children and while we might not be armed with a degree in food science, we hope to meet our kids' requirements with what we buy. The trouble is, these days supermarkets have many products designed to appeal to children and many of them will have artificial additives that aren't always easily identified (unless you are armed with a list of numbers and names!). With so many choices it can be confusing and frustrating trying to find a product that balances nutritional requirements and budget.

A good way to compare is to look at the list of ingredients and buy those products with simple ingredients that you understand - sugar, fruit, flour, cocoa, vegetables, rice or rice flour, milk, malt etc. Artificial additives have a tricky way of being listed as numbers or have unpronounceable names and they could be artificial colours, flavours or preservatives. While food authorities declare the additives in our food to be safe, if you have a choice why not avoid them? It's simple really; the fewer ingredients, the more likely it should be in your shopping trolley. Of course sometimes natural additives such as preservative, sugar and oil might be required to make a product safe or palatable, but artificial colour in butter? Or added artificial flavour in fruit products? Using the knowledge you have of your child's tastes and requirements along with your common sense as a parent or carer should help you make better choices in the supermarket and maybe even save a dollar or two!

Next time you are comparing products to add to milk, take a look the ingredients list on a tin of AktaVite. You will find that with just four main ingredients; sugar, cocoa, barley malt extract and wheat starch, AktaVite is a nutritious and wholesome food with no artificial colours, flavours or preservatives, making it perfect for your child. The only extras we've added are eight essential vitamins and minerals to help young bodies grow strong but we've left out lactose and genetically modified ingredients. You might also be interested to know that AktaVite is Kosher certified and Halal too!