
THE "INFO"-HALER



TAKE IN THE INFORMATION

An easy to understand, informative newsletter for our patients of all ages from the
Allergy & Asthma Associates of Michigan, P.C.

FOOD ADDITIVES

Food additives are the food preservatives and food dyes added to the foods we eat. They have been used for many years and are the number one cause of non-IgE mediated food intolerances. Food additives are used for five main reasons. They are used to maintain product consistency, to improve or maintain nutritional value, to maintain palatability and wholesomeness, to enhance flavor, and finally to impart the desired color.

The most common food additive is tartrazine (yellow food dye #5). Tartrazine is found in tacos, potato chips, medication capsules, some toothpastes, and hundreds of other products. A derivative of coal tar, it is used to color beverages, candy, and other foods. People who have asthma that is triggered by aspirin products are more likely to have an intolerance to yellow food dye #5, though this has not been scientifically proven. Tartrazine can cause hives in sensitive individuals, though the reaction is not very common.

Monosodium Glutamate (MSG) is another additive and a flavor enhancer. It is the sodium salt of glutamic acid, an amino acid found naturally in the human body and all protein containing foods such as meat, cheese, and milk. MSG is often found in Chinese food. A small number of people experience mild, short-lived reactions after eating MSG. Generally these reactions consist of flushing, sensations of warmth, headache, facial pressure, chest pain, feelings of detachment, or asthma symptoms. These reactions are transient and occur after digesting large amounts of MSG.

Sulfites are anti-oxidants used to preserve the color and crispness of foods such as dried fruits and vegetables, and to inhibit the growth of mold and microorganisms in fermented foods such as wine. The FDA has mandated that all foods containing sulfites be labeled as such and that restaurants disclose the use of sulfites to their customers. Products containing sulfites are to be labeled with any of the following terms: sodium sulfite, sulfur dioxide, sodium or potassium bisulfite, and sodium or potassium metabisulfite. In 1986 the FDA banned the spraying of sulfites on fresh fruits and vegetables intended to be served raw to customers. Sulfites can be found in lettuce, raw vegetables, potatoes, beers, wines, some fruit drinks, dried fruits, dips (esp. those with avocado), seafood (esp. shrimp), beet sugar, corn sweeteners, candies, cereals, ice-creams, butter, margarine, gelatin, yogurt, gravies, puddings, mustard, mouthwashes, throat lozengers, and various processed and packaged foods. Sulfites are also found in many medications including cardiac medications, antibiotics, intravenous solutions, steroids, pain killers, some mood altering drugs, and in the asthma medications Isuprel, Bronkosol, and Metaprel. Sulfites are harmless to most people but can present serious health risks to a small segment of the population that is sulfite sensitive. Exposure to sulfites for sensitive people can cause symptoms such as nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, itchiness, hives, difficulty swallowing, shortness of breath, severe asthma attacks, allergic anaphylaxis, loss of consciousness, and even death. Reactions generally occur within minutes of digestion, but can be delayed by several hours. Serious and fatal sulfite reactions can occur in people without any history of allergies or asthma. Sulfites give off a gas called sulfur dioxide which is inhaled while eating the sulfited food. The gas irritates the lungs and can cause severe bronchospasms especially for an asthmatic patient. Sulfites are produced naturally during the process of fermentation of wine.

Another food additive is aspartame. Aspartame is a low calorie sweetener and has not been associated with food allergies or food intolerances to date.

Finally, foods developed by fermentation processes, whose shelf lives are relatively long such as meats and aged cheeses, are often mold contaminated. Molds have been associated with food intolerances and also asthma attacks. Foods containing molds are beers, wines, baked goods with large amounts of yeast, buttermilk, sour cream, canned juices, canned tomatoes, cheeses, cider, dried fruit, leftover meat or fish, smoked meat or fish, mushrooms, sauerkraut, vinegar, ketchup, relish, olives, pickles, and mayonnaise. If you are mold sensitive, you should follow a mold elimination diet.

Approximately 1% of the population is susceptible to an anaphylactic food reaction. Anaphylactic reactions are generally not predictable so all precautions must be taken. People with severe food intolerances should wear medic-alert bracelets, carry an Epi-pen for self-administration of life saving epinephrine if needed, and learn to read food ingredients labels very carefully. If you have experienced adverse reactions to certain foods, be sure to let the Doctors know. Accurate, detailed, and complete histories are mandatory for the successful treatment of allergy and asthma patients.

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