



The Dirty Dozen

Packaged and processed foods are convenient, portable and stay fresh for a long time (thanks to all those preservatives). They have been a mainstay of the American diet since the early twentieth century. Unfortunately, the additives put into processed foods to make them look and taste better include unhealthy amounts of salt, fat and sugar – and those are the ones you can pronounce. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) deems these ingredients as “GRAS” (generally regarded as safe). However, they do not account for the fact that these additives are in just about every food and consumed at every meal over a long period of time.

The truth is these additives are wreaking havoc on our health. Consuming foods containing these additives may cause side effects like migraines, behavioral issues, food allergies, increased waistlines, decreased absorption of vitamins and minerals, cancer and more. Below is a list of the 12 most pervasive and detrimental food additives and substances in the American food system, in no particular order.

1. **Artificial Sweeteners** are a combination of chemicals that exist to make our foods sweeter without the calories of sugar. Most of the artificial sweeteners have side effects, and their chemical breakdown in the body can be toxic. In addition, in combination with other food additives like artificial colors, artificial sweeteners can have a much more potent effect on nerve cells.

Ex: Aspartame, Saccharin, Acesulfame, Sucralose, Neotame

2. **Refined Sugar:** People in the US consume 150 to 175 pounds of sugar per year. In other words, people are consuming half a cup of sugar a day, and most aren't even aware of it. Due to its insidious nature and the fact that it can be found in virtually all processed foods (unless they say “sugar-free,” that is), we subsist on sugar.

Ex: Sugar, Dextrose, Fructose, Glucose, Corn Syrup, Lactose, Maltodextrin, Maltose, Sucrose

3. **Monosodium Glutamate (MSG)** is used to bring out the flavor in foods. Since 1960, the use of MSG has caused some concern when it was discovered that large amounts of MSG fed to infant mice destroyed nerve cells in the brain.

4. **Artificial Colors** are synthetic chemicals that do not occur in nature. Most are derived from coal tar and can contain up to 10 parts per million of lead and arsenic and still be generally recognized as safe by the FDA. Artificial colors can cause allergic reactions and hyperactivity and ADD in children, and may contribute to visual and learning disorders or cause nerve damage.

Ex: FD&C Red #40, FD&C Yellow #5, etc...

5. **BHA, BHT & TBHQ** block the process of oil rancidity. These additives seem to affect sleep and appetite, and have been associated with liver and kidney damage, baldness, behavioral problems, cancer, fetal abnormalities and growth retardation.

6. **Sodium Nitrate and Nitrite** are preservatives that are added to processed meat products. These compounds transform into cancer-causing agents called nitrosamines in the stomach. Noticeable side effects include headaches, nausea, vomiting and dizziness.



7. **Sodium Benzoate** is a preservative that can cause hyperactivity and is linked to cellular damage and cancer. When combined with “*citric acid*” or “*ascorbic acid*”, it can generate “*benzene*”, a known carcinogen.

8. **Olestra (Olean)** is a calorie-free fat substitute used as an ingredient in snacks and chips. Olestra inhibits the absorption of some vitamins and other nutrients. It can also cause diarrhea and anal leakage.

9. **Brominated Vegetable Oil (BVO)** is used to keep flavor oils in soft drinks in suspension. Bromate, the main ingredient of BVO, is a poison. Just two ounces of a 2% solution of BVO can severely poison a child. In adults, this additive reduces immune defenses and depletes histamine, which can lead to allergic reactions.

10. **Partially Hydrogenated Vegetable Oil** is made by reacting vegetable oil with hydrogen. When this occurs, the level of polyunsaturated oils (good fat) is reduced and trans fats are created. It is associated with heart disease, breast and colon cancer, atherosclerosis and elevated cholesterol.

11. **Pesticides:** Every year more than two billion pounds of pesticides are applied to our food supply. That’s about 10 pounds per person per year. Many of the pesticides used throughout the world are carcinogenic. Pesticide accumulation also undermines our ability to resist infectious organisms, may impair fertility and contributes to miscarriages and birth defects.

12. **Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs)** are plants or animals that have had their DNA modified. In the US, the majority of the corn, soybean, cotton and canola crops are now genetically modified, and one or more of these can be found in nearly every processed food.

You can avoid many of these ingredients by choosing organic foods. However, just because something is organic does not mean they are free from toxins. Be sure to read the ingredients list on all processed foods. Best option is to purchase “whole” foods and make your food fresh. 😊