

EWG's Dirty Dozen Guide to Food Chemicals



THE TOP 12 TO AVOID

Our food should be nourishing and safe to eat.

But more than 10,000 chemicals, some of which are potentially toxic, are allowed in food sold in the U.S.

Almost 99 percent of food chemicals introduced since 2000 were greenlighted for use by food and chemical companies rather than properly reviewed by the Food and Drug Administration. Many of these widely used chemicals are associated with major health harms, including increased risk of cancer, developmental harm and hormone disruption.

These substances end up in what we eat, thanks to a legal loophole that allows foods to be classified as “**generally recognized as safe.**” Food and chemical companies have exploited this loophole for decades – instead of the FDA determining which food chemicals are safe to consume, manufacturers decide.

That can leave consumers struggling to know what’s safe for their families.

By highlighting some of the worst offenders on the market, EWG’s Dirty Dozen Guide to Food Chemicals shows you which chemicals in food to avoid:

POTASSIUM BROMATE

Potassium bromate is a possible human carcinogen added to flour used in packaged baked goods.

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PROPYL PARABEN

Propyl paraben is a preservative used in pastries and some tortillas. It causes developmental and reproductive harm.

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BHA

Butylated hydroxyanisole, better known as BHA, is a preservative used in cured meats and other foods. Multiple sources have identified it as a possible human carcinogen.

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BHT

Butylated hydroxytoluene, also called BHT, is a preservative found in some cereal and other foods. It’s a chemical cousin of BHA and is a possible human carcinogen.

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TBHQ

Tert-butylhydroquinone, or TBHQ, is a preservative used in Pop-Tarts and other processed foods. It may harm the immune system and weaken the effectiveness of vaccines.

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TITANIUM DIOXIDE

Titanium dioxide is a color additive used mostly in candy. It may damage DNA.

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BVO

Brominated vegetable oil, or BVO, is used to stabilize citrus flavors in sodas and fruity drinks. It can cause neurological and reproductive harm and thyroid toxicity.

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ARTIFICIAL COLORS

Synthetic food dye can be found in many types of food and beverages. It can affect development and cause behavioral difficulties in children. There are seven dyes that are especially concerning: Red 3, Red 40, Yellow 5, Yellow 6, Blue 1, Blue 2 and Green 3.

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PROPYL GALLATE

Propyl gallate is a preservative used in vegetable oil, meat products and chewing gum, among other products. It may cause hormone disruption and has been linked to an increased risk of asthma, hyperactivity and even cancer.

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ARTIFICIAL SWEETENERS

Artificial sweeteners can affect the hormones that regulate metabolism and have a negative effect on weight control.

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ADA

Azodicarbonamide, or ADA, is used as a dough conditioner and strengthener, as well as a bleaching agent in breads and pastries. ADA has been linked to an increased risk of cancer. It may also cause liver and kidney injury and affect the blood and the nervous and respiratory systems.

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SODIUM BENZOATE

Sodium benzoate is a preservative used mostly in carbonated drinks, fruit juice, salad dressing and fermented foods. When combined with ascorbic acid, citric acid and vitamin C, it has been linked to an increased risk of cancer. The reaction between sodium benzoate and any of these three compounds forms benzene, a chemical associated with blood cancer.

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