

Hidden Ingredients in Food Labels

For years now, the importance of reading food labels has been pounded into our heads. Whether we're looking at the macro and micronutrient breakdowns or inquiring about ingredients, it's important to be a well-informed consumer. You will oftentimes find that even foods that appear to have suitable macronutrients are made with some sketchy ingredients. Whether you stick to the principle of "if you can't pronounce it, don't eat it" or not, investigating what exactly makes up the foods you are eating isn't a bad idea.

There are basic "no-no" ingredients that media has plastered across their outlets and seared into our brains- high fructose corn syrup, soybean oil, etc. But there are a ton of other ingredients that most people can neither spell nor pronounce lurking in our foods- even the healthy ones! Here are a few of these to look out for next time you find yourself reading an ingredient list.

Diacetyl: Studies found that this chemical has been linked to respiratory problems and creation of plaque in the brain that is a sign of Alzheimer's disease. Seeing as how this ingredient produces a buttery flavor and scent, it is found most often in microwave popcorn, but also in candy, margarine and baked goods.

Butylated hydroxyanisole (BHA): This ingredient is used to prevent food from spoiling. In lab tests, consumption of BHA's has been linked to causing cancer in rats and other laboratory animals. Having said that, BHA is considered to be a carcinogen.

Nitrites: If you've ever eaten a hot dog, lunch meat or processed meats of any kind, you've eaten nitrite. Nitrite is used to preserve meats and keep their color looking "fresh." Nitrite consumption has been linked to increased colorectal/stomach/pancreatic cancer, COPD, mutations of DNA and greater risks of developing brain tumors.

Keep in mind that all the ingredients listed above and many more are viewed under a controversial scope. As with anything deemed "good" or "bad," there is science to support the claims and there is science to counteract them just as well. Think about the back and forth nature of the food industry the past few years regarding artificial sweeteners.

Aside from ingredients, there are also some strange things lurking in your food- sometimes just for the purpose of altering color or appearance. For example, cochineal insects are ground up by the thousands, which produces a red powder. This powder is then mixed with water to produce a red food coloring. This dye is used to color candies, juices, and most infamously, in a handful of Starbucks drinks. Tartrazine, also known as "Yellow #5," is also used as a food dye, and is found in prescriptions and food. Yellow #5 comes from coal tar and is known to cause severe allergic reactions and side effects in some individuals, such as thyroid cancer, clinical depression, insomnia and aggravation of Carpal Tunnel.

As you can see, there are many ingredients hiding in the foods we consume every day that aren't exactly what we want to be consuming. Oftentimes, when picking up a package of essentially "calorie-free" food (Walden Farms has built an entire business around it), you will be shocked by the long list of barely-recognizable ingredients. Some say it's the price you pay for aesthetics and to save calories, while others would rather eat the real product than put a load of fake ingredients into their bodies. It's difficult to be on top of your game to the point where you know what each ingredient

means or where it came from. But it is safe to say that if you try to stick to foods that are closest to their true form, you can be as sure as possible that you are avoiding any hidden surprises.