

5 CONTROVERSIAL INGREDIENTS NUTRITIONISTS WON'T TOUCH

by Jackie Goldman

Which is healthier: a plate of broccoli or a donut? While the healthy choice may often be obvious at times, roaming through the grocery aisles, it can be difficult to differentiate between the healthy, not so bad and just plain awful.

Some may consult a dietitian or nutritionist to determine what should be on their grocery list and from what to steer clear. So what are nutritionists and dietitians eating, and what are they avoiding at all costs?

Rosemary Mueller, a registered dietitian at Advocate Medical Group's Weight Management Program in Park Ridge, Ill. says she avoids these five controversial ingredients:

- **BHA.** Butylated hydroxyanisole, or BHA, is an additive which prevents fats from spoiling. Although it's on the GRAS (generally recognized as safe) list by the FDA, there is some animal research that connects the additive to cancer growth. "Minimize oil-containing processed food you eat to avoid this additive," says Mueller. "Even better: minimize processed foods all together."
- **Fractionated palm kernel oil.** Fractionated oil helps prevent the chocolate coating on protein and candy bars from melting. But be advised that palm kernel oil is 80 percent saturated fat. That means it can lead to increased levels of LDL, the less desirable form of cholesterol, in the blood. "Think twice before gobbling down 'healthy' protein bars and check the label to make sure this ingredient is not present before consuming," says Mueller.
- **Sodium nitrate and nitrite.** Nitrites are added to "cured" meats like hot dogs, bacon and deli meats as a preservative. However, these can form nitrosamines in the body, which may promote cancer growth. Mueller recommends avoiding cured meats or at least limiting them to no more than three servings a week.
- **MSG.** Monosodium glutamate is a flavor enhancer often added to Chinese foods and products as well as some canned vegetables, soups and some meats. Although it is generally recognized as safe, a percentage of people who consume it may develop migraine headaches or have a more immediate adverse reaction, otherwise known as Chinese restaurant syndrome, explains Mueller. "Enhance flavors in cooking by using fresh herbs and spices instead, and when in a restaurant, request that your food be prepared without MSG," she advises.
- **Potassium benzoate.** Added to some diet soft drinks and fruit drinks, there is a possibility that a toxin, benzene, can form in low levels when this ingredient is present. Although the FDA regulates levels of benzene fairly closely, no one needs to drink diet soda, and it provides no nutritional value, says Mueller. "Regular soda is no better with its sugar content, so if you are looking for a beverage to quench your thirst, you should focus on water instead," Mueller recommends.

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Wishing you joy and good health,
Mary Bohlen RN
SJParishNurse@comcast.net