

ORGANIC LIVING

By
Robert Rodale

FOOD ADDITIVES CAUSE STRANGE EFFECTS

A strange thing happened recently in a West Virginia laboratory when adult house flies were fed a diet containing common food coloring additives. As soon as the flies were exposed to light, they died—often within an hour.

According to researcher Tim Yoho, the flies were killed by photodynamic action, a destructive effect produced when the dye and normal light interact. "The wide usage of dye additives in foods, drugs and cosmetics, could result in photodynamic injury to man," warns Yoho, a Post-Doctoral Fellow in West Virginia University's entomology department.

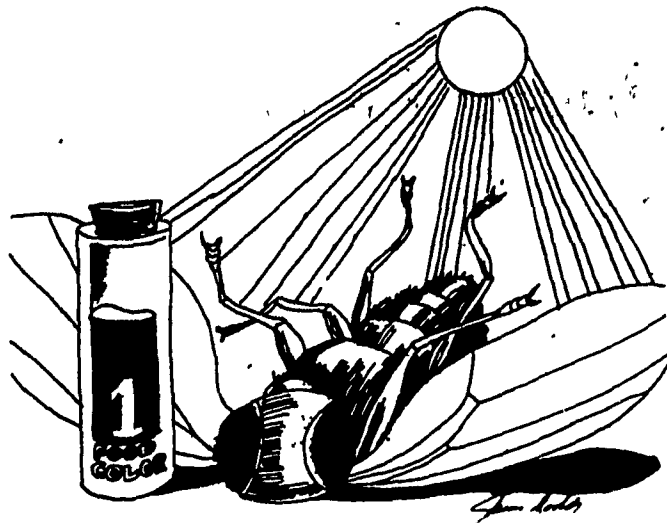
Artificial colors, flavors and other chemical food additives are also causing children to behave in strange ways, but not because of photodynamic effect. The chemicals make susceptible youngsters so hyperactive and poorly behaved that they can't sit still in class long enough to learn anything, says Dr. Ben Feingold of the Kaiser-Permanente Medical Group in San Francisco.

Most doctors and educators rely on amphetamine drugs to control such problem children, but Dr. Feingold got excellent results by taking away additive-ridden junk foods. "We can turn these children on and off at will," he observed, "just by regulating their diet."

What kind of foods must go? The average child's problems start at breakfast, he says, with cereals that are loaded with nonessential flavors and colors, or perhaps frozen waffles or frozen French toast dyed with tartrazine (a yellow food coloring). "At school," he says, "the same ritual is continued at lunch," where nitrate-laden hot dogs, luncheon meats, ice cream and other heavily preserved and otherwise chemicalized foods are served.

Adults aren't immune to mysterious reactions either, warns Dr. Stephen D. Lockey, Sr., a Lancaster, Pennsylvania, physician who treats victims of allergic reactions.

One of Dr. Lockey's patients, a 37-year-old housewife, developed hives whenever she ate any food containing yellow food coloring. When she was advised to give up custards,



cakes, lemon pies and all other processed foods containing the chemical, her symptoms disappeared.

Another young woman experienced sudden weakness and extreme fatigue after eating corn flakes or dehydrated potatoes. Yet skin tests indicated she was not allergic to corn or potato. Dr. Lockey finally traced her problem to BHA (betahydroxyacid) and BHT (betahydroxytoluene), two chemical preservatives used in those processed foods.

In other cases, chemicals in ice cream, bakery goods, candy, chewing gum, soft drinks, gelatin desserts, jams and cake mixes may cause trouble, says Dr. Lockey.

With an estimated 2,500 substances currently being added to our food supply, it's not surprising that scientists are stumbling upon more and more danger areas:

Sodium nitrite in frankfurters, bacon, salami, ham and other cured meats can trigger severe headaches in susceptible individuals, according to University of California neurologists Drs. W. R. Henderson and N. H. Raskin. Those "hot-dog headaches," as they call them, often begin within 30 minutes of eating the chemical. The doctors believe the reaction is similar to the headache accompanying "Chinese restaurant syndrome," which often follows a meal heavily spiced with monosodium glutamate.

Antibacterial fatty acids commonly used to preserve pies, ice cream, beverages and some canned and frozen foods can stunt cell growth. At higher concentrations the additives—including sodium propionate, sorbate and propyl paraben—can even kill the cells. That was discovered in a Georgetown University study funded by the National Institute of Health.

What else might additives be doing? Many instances of mild psychological trauma and other weird symptoms could conceivably be caused by food chemicals. But scientists may never be able to pinpoint which ones are responsible, because of the complex interactions between all the thousands of chemicals in our environment.

While researchers are busy trying to solve the puzzle, you can protect yourself by eating foods that don't contain additives. Read labels. You may need a magnifying glass, but you'll be surprised to see how many chemical extras go into the simplest of foods. By comparing brands carefully, you can usually find a no-additives or fewer-additives alternative.

You can't go entirely by the label though. "The presence of coloring in butter, cheese and ice cream need not even be

specified at all," warns Michael Jacobson, author of "Eater's Digest." Other so-called standardized foods needn't list all their ingredients on the label either. In the absence of full disclosure, Dr. Feingold says he would like to see the adoption of a special symbol of packages to tell shoppers at a glance when the product is free from all chemical additives.

Naturalness is your only real guarantee. Buy and serve more foods that don't depend on additives for their appeal. Fresh fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds and grains are good examples of whole, unprocessed foods that get through to the consumer relatively unscathed.

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"Hot-Line to Health" is a 48-page booklet containing many new findings about chemical hazards in our food and environment. It's available for fifty cents from Robert Rodale, Organic Living, in care of this newspaper. Be sure to ask for the booklet by name, and please allow at least three weeks for delivery.

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