

ADDITIVES: What's In Your Kid's Lunch Box?



While some food additives have a nutritive purpose, such as B-vitamins including folic acid to enrich white flour, vitamin D and A added to milk, iron added to breakfast cereals and iodine added to salt, others do not. Many additives used in our food system help preserve food or enhance the food's flavor, texture, or appearance. As far as nutrition goes, they do not improve the health of our

Preservatives: Sodium nitrite—Mostly found in cured lunch meats, bacon, and hotdogs. Its main purpose is to prevent the growth of bacteria. [Sodium nitrite leads to the formation of nitrosamines in foods](#), which are carcinogenic. They also tend to be high in sodium, fat or both. Also beware of **BHA & BHT** which are used in chips, oils, or some cereals to delay the rancidity of fats. Some studies suggest they may be carcinogens in the human body.

Artificial Colorings: Which are [controversial](#) and banned in many European countries. They are commonly found in junk foods such as candy, sodas and other sugary beverages. Ask yourself, which healthy foods and beverages have to be artificially colored to make them palatable? None! The colors that nature puts into our food can actually enhance health so why go for artificial when the real will do?

High fructose corn syrup and sucrose: These sweeteners are used in many processed foods and sodas. While research to confirm the exact health effects is ongoing, it is clear that added sugars replace healthy nutrients in our daily food intake. Foods that are high in high fructose corn syrup or sugar tend to contain empty calories and minimal nutrients.

Partially hydrogenated oils and trans-fats are found mainly in processed baked goods and frozen ready-to-eat entrees. They are added to extend shelf life of the product but these fats increase blood lipids. Instead, make your own baked goods and [modify recipes](#) through use of canola oil, plain yogurt or applesauce instead of margarine or shortening.

A healthy [homemade lunch](#) needn't be overly elaborate. Consider the following tips:

- Homemade versions of your favorite take-out or pre-packaged foods. The bonus? You have control over what ingredients go into your meal, and get to improvise to your heart's content. For example: a whole wheat wrap with turkey, shredded mozzarella, spinach leaves, and black beans. Use cookie cutters for fun sandwich shapes with wholesome fillings.
- When you bake, make multiple batches and freeze the extras. It's much better to supply your own homemade oatmeal chocolate chip cookie as a treat than to rely on the pre-packaged versions which can sit for months on the store shelf without going bad.
- Include a consistent supply of fresh fruits, fat free yogurt without added sugars, and occasional small homemade cookies or muffins. If you want to provide juice as a drink, buy 100% fruit or vegetable juice. Avoid "punch" or "fruity blend" drinks that contain little or no fruit.
- Don't forget to add a carton of skim or 1% plain milk; great for nutrition and without added sugars.

