

By: ~~September 2008~~ Science Editor

Food Additives and Colorants Impair Learning and Focusing

In children and adults, too

They are carcinogenic (cancer inducing), make you obese, provoke diabetes and induce skin irritations, amongst other nasty effects. Now, food colorings and additives have been connected to hyperactivity in children by a British research. Many parents exclude foods with additives from their children's menu in cases of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) but the new research made at the University of Southampton, led by psychology Professor Dr. Jim Stevenson, is the first to detect a link between the two, showing that a mix of several food colorants and benzoate preservative affects the children's behavior. A group of 153 three-year-old children and 144 eight and nine year-olds received for six week drinks containing a mix of preservatives and colors found in many commercial sweets, beverages and other foods. Two types of drinks, but also a placebo drink (one with no additives) was used. One beverage contained sunset yellow (E110), carmoisine (E122), tartrazine (E102), ponceau 4R (E124) and the preservative sodium benzoate and the other quinoline yellow (E104), allura red (E129), sunset yellow, carmoisine and sodium benzoate. Teachers and parents examined children's hyperactivity and inattention using a computer test while unaware of which drink the child had drunk. The children who received the drinks with additives and preservatives were clearly more hyperactive and had shorter attention spans, a main cause of learning deficit and school and social failure. ADHD impairs attention, task-accomplishing focusing abilities. The older children's behavior was affected by both additive mixtures, while the younger children more by the first mixture. "The study does not pinpoint which additives are the main culprits because all the children were given a mix of additives and rather than a particular one." said Stevenson. The researchers warn that parents should exclude artificial preservatives and colors from their children's diet and read food labels before buying products. In US alone, over 2 million children have ADHD, relatively thrice more than 25 years ago. In France, one in 400 children suffers from ADHD. Stevenson warns that the negative effects of the additives on attention deficit could be applied to adults, too.