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Seeing red over additives

Rachel Browne
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ARTIFICIAL food colourings linked to hyperactive behaviour in young people need to be phased out in Australia, as they have been in Britain, according to a growing chorus of nutritionists and child welfare groups.

Grocery chain Aldi and at least three large food brands have already chosen to remove such colourings from products available on Australian supermarket shelves.

But the government agency Food Standards Australia New Zealand says there is not enough evidence to ban the colourings known as sunset yellow (E110), quinoline yellow (E104), carmoisine (E122), allura red (E129), ponceau 4R (E124), and tartrazine (E102). The synthetic dyes are contained in more than 1000 products available in Australia, many of which are aimed at children.

The colourings - dubbed as the Southampton Six after a 2007 study by Southampton University in Britain established a link between them and children's behaviour - have been phased out of British supermarkets voluntarily after a recommendation from the British Food Standards Agency.

The European Union legislated last month that foodstuffs containing the additives should carry this package warning: "Tartrazine [or one of the other colours] may have an adverse effect on activity and attention in children."

A report this year by the US Centre for Science in the Public Interest, titled *Food Dyes: A Rainbow of Risks*, found that colourings can pose a risk of cancer, hyperactivity in children and allergies, and called for them to be banned across America.

Two-thirds of Australian mothers have noticed behavioural changes in their children after eating food containing artificial colours and preservatives, according to a survey this month by family research and welfare group Karitane.

The mothers surveyed said children became more restless, agitated, hyperactive, erratic, inconsolable and even aggressive.

A survey by the Dietitians Association of Australia found 21 per cent of children aged nine months were being given biscuits and cakes every day.

"Most of the mothers found they had clearly been able to see some sort of link between when their child consumed some food that contained preservatives and colours and behavioural change," Karitane clinical director Deborah Nemeth said. "So the changes in their behaviour were anything from becoming very restless to becoming quite disruptive and very distressed and being difficult to console. For older toddlers and preschoolers, the mothers described them as becoming hyperactive."

Ms Nemeth advised parents to avoid foods with artificial colourings. "When some kids consume these foods, it's almost like you can see a switch being turned on."

Naturopath Hugh Cowan said Australia should ban the colourings. "We are told a lot about the dangers of childhood obesity but these chemicals affect children's moods, their behaviour, their ability to focus in class and their ability to learn."

Australian Food and Grocery Council chief Kate Carnell said Nestle, which owns Uncle Toby's and Allen's brands, had stopped using the colourings in some products.

Nutritionist Karen Fischer said consumer power should not be underestimated. "We are prescribing drugs to modify children's behaviour but in some cases that behaviour is caused by their diets. If people stop buying products with colourings and preservatives, manufacturers will stop using them."

Lydia Buchtman from Food Standards Australia New Zealand said the agency was monitoring research on food colourings. "Even with known allergens such as peanuts, we don't handle that by banning the allergen. It's handled by labelling. By law, all those colourings and additives have to be listed on the label so if you know you or your child has a reaction to that colouring, you can see it on the label and you don't buy the product."

E102

TARTRAZINE Fairy floss, pastries, cakes, biscuits, caramel, ice-cream cones, cocktail onions, gherkins, pickles, chocolates, butterscotch, liquorice, jelly beans, jelly babies, and flavoured mineral water, soda and alcohol.

E104

QUINOLINE YELLOW Lollies, liquorice, lemon sherbet, flavoured soda, mouthwash, medications.

E110

SUNSET YELLOW Cakes, biscuits, flavoured mineral water, custard mixes, chocolates, jelly babies, ice-creams, iceblocks, meat pies, pizza.

E122

CARMOISINE Prawn crackers, flavoured milk, sundaes, ice-cream, cordials, jam rolls, biscuits, lollies, marshmallows, musk sticks, strawberry topping.

E124

PONCEAU 4R Jam, curry paste, ice-cream, flavoured milk, instant pudding, Turkish delight, chocolates, musk sticks, jelly beans, jelly babies, pizza.

E129

ALLURA RED Custard powder, chocolates, lollies, chewing gum, flavoured alcohol, milkshakes, sundaes, muesli bars, glazed cherries, medications.

This story was found at: <http://www.smh.com.au/lifestyle/wellbeing/seeing-red-over-additives-20100925-15rkz.html>