Nutrition News

Department of Human Nutrition

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# Artificial Food Color, Additives in Children's Food Still Suspect in Hyperactivity

The science of nutrition continues to evolve – and occasionally, nutrition research brings us full circle. That is the current situation involving artificial food colors and other additives and their relationship to hyperactivity in children.

Many parents, physicians and nutrition educators recall the Feingold Diet of the late 1960s and early 1970s, developed by noted pediatrician and allergist Dr. Ben F. Feingold. The Feingold Diet helped families steer their children with hyperactive behavior away from foods with certain artificial colors and additives, and naturally occurring salicylates. Although many parents believed the recommendations helpful, the Feingold diet was found to have no favorable effect when tested scientifically. The debate has continued since the diet's introduction, and ongoing research has repeatedly attempted to solve the mystery.

New research published in the September 6, 2007, edition of the online British medical journal *The Lancet* supports those early connections between a child's diet and hyperactivity. This study examined the effect of sodium benzoate, a preservative, and artificial colors on 3-year-old and 8/9-year-old children in the general population, without known hyperactivity. The authors concluded that the additives increased hyperactivity in the children

**The Take-Home Message** – This issue will continue to make the news, so watch for developments and official recommendations as more is learned. As nutrition educators, we can let concerned consumers know that ongoing study is focusing on the relationship between artificial food additives and child hyperactivity. Parents who are convinced that there is a connection between their child's behavior and his or her diet should talk to the child's health care provider, who may recommend further testing.

For more information about healthy eating, contact your local Extension office.