

What do people think about food additives?

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Whether they are dyes or preservatives, emulsifiers or sweeteners—ingredient lists of sweets, beverages and other processed foods often contain food additives. A current, representative survey by the German Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (BfR) shows: 55 percent of the population in Germany try to avoid additives when buying food. "Many people worry about possible health effects, at the same time, they do not feel well informed about food additives," says BfR

President Professor Dr. Dr. Andreas Hensel. "Food additives undergo rigorous assessments in Europe. They may only be used if their intended use is not linked to any health impairments."

Additives are added to food for technological purposes. For example, dyes affect the appearance, emulsifiers the texture and sweeteners the taste of food—properties which most of the respondents of the study rate as being important or very important. More than half try to avoid additives when buying food. For most of the respondents, the perceived health risk of additives is greater than the rated benefit—in particular, this applies to sweeteners, dyes and flavor enhancers (each more than 40%). Above all, possible intolerances as well as the promotion of cancer and obesity are risks that the respondents associate with food additives.

The results further show that the population rates their knowledge of food additives as low. On the one hand, people do not feel well informed, for example when it comes to the functions or possible health risks of food additives. On the other hand, the results show that even commonly used food additives are unknown to many. Over 40 percent of respondents each state they do not know the flavor enhancer monosodium glutamate and the sweetener aspartame. Not all are aware of the primary functional group of individual food additives: Though the majority knows that carotene is used as dye, only about a quarter of respondents knows that lactic acid is mainly used as a preservative.

The term food [additive](#) is defined in Regulation (EC) No. 1333/2008. According to which it is defined as a substance with or without nutritional value that is added to [food](#) for technological purposes. Food additives may only be used in the European Union if they have previously been approved. The prerequisite for this is that the substance is harmless to health for the intended use. Furthermore, there must be a technological need for the additive and consumers must not be misled by

its use. A [food additive](#) approved in the EU is given an E number and must be specified in the list of ingredients.

More information: PDF of the Consumer Monitor special on food additives: [www.bfr.bund.de/cm/364/bfr-con ... dditives-in-food.pdf](http://www.bfr.bund.de/cm/364/bfr-con...dditives-in-food.pdf)

A-Z index of food additives: [www.bfr.bund.de/en/a-z_index/f... dditives-130074.html](http://www.bfr.bund.de/en/a-z_index/f...dditives-130074.html)

Provided by BfR Federal Institute for Risk Assessment

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