

ANNATTO



Introduction Annatto dye is increasingly becoming the preferred choice of food colour for many food, cosmetic and medicinal companies. This is due to it being classified as 'natural', however, let us explain to you what this 'natural' product can do to your body and your health.

What Is It?

Annatto is obtained from the thin resinous aril portion of seeds of *Bixa Orellana* - a tropical plant of great agro-industrial interest. Bixin and norbixin are the main components of annatto colour which imparts red to yellow hue to the food matrix. Annatto is the most sought after natural colorant in the food industry in view of its availability, affordability and viability. It also finds wide use in cosmetics, pharmacy and dyeing purposes.

Where Is It Found?

Annatto can be found in numerous food items including, but not limited to:

- ice cream – Fun Fact - Australia is the only country in the world where Magnum ice creams contain 160b,
- flavoured chips,
- snack foods,
- dairy products including some cheese and yoghurts,
- confectionery,
- processed cereal products,
- flour products,
- biscuits, cakes and pastries,
- processed meat products,
- fruit and vegetable juices,
- formulated beverages,
- spreads, like margarine,
- frozen chips and
- salad dressings

There are safer alternatives to use, for example 160a (beta-carotene) is a much safer option as carotene is derived from carrots, pumpkin or even tomatoes. Unfortunately these have been deemed too expensive or too difficult to source according to the FSANZ (Foods Standards Australia and New Zealand). It is also worth noting that 160a can sometimes be sourced from genetically modified plants, so you still need to be careful.



The Health Concerns

According to the medical website 'webmd', Annatto is deemed 'likely safe' for most people when used in food amounts. When they say 'food amounts' they are referring to the amounts deemed safe by the food standards boards in your country. The problem we have with that statement is, this additive is being added to more and more products and you are no longer consuming small amounts of it.

At times, you could be eating this additive up to 5- 6 times a day, or over 40 times a week. Therefore, you are no longer consuming this in small doses.

Annatto is one of the harshest additives in our foods. Research has linked this additive to skin irritations, sleeplessness, hives, nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, itchy or red eyes, asthma and concentration issues in both adults and children. As well as behavioural issues such as tantrums, hyperactivity and even head banging in younger children. There are numerous reports that Annatto has increased symptoms of Irritable Bowel Syndrome and just as many reports that Annatto has aggravated symptoms of ADHD, ADD and even Autism.

This additive when used in food, can be highly toxic and will most likely cause some form of reaction. It is our recommendation to avoid it at all costs, especially children, and to continue to check the ingredients of products.

The Science

Annatto is also an ingredient in some medicines, so not only are you eating this additive, you are now being given it when you are sick. Did you know that Annatto has a few medical warnings associated with it (when used for medicinal purposes)?

It is highly recommended that it be avoided by pregnant and breastfeeding women. With the statement: "There is not enough reliable information about the safety of taking annatto if you are pregnant or breastfeeding. Stay on the safe side and avoid use.

If you have diabetes, research suggests that annatto might increase or decrease blood sugar levels. "Medications for diabetes (Anti-diabetes drugs) interacts with Annatto. Annatto might increase blood sugar. Diabetes medications are used to lower blood sugar. By increasing blood sugar, annatto might decrease the effectiveness of diabetes medications. Monitor your blood sugar closely. The dose of your diabetes medication might need to be changed.

Due to Annatto effecting blood sugar levels, concerns have been raised that it might interfere with blood sugar control during and after surgery. It has been recommended that if you are using annatto for medicinal purposes to stop at least 2 weeks before a scheduled surgery. It is our recommendation to talk to your health care provider about this additive and ask further questions regarding the safety of this additive.

The Good News

We are slowly starting to get the word out that this additive, whilst natural, is not safe. It has been removed from a few foods, thanks to some fantastic work by The Food Intolerance Network, but we still need to do more. Please take a moment to sign the petition, and to help make a difference.