**Questions and Answers on food flavouring**

Few people know that food colourings are not food but a group of so-called additives, i.e. a food colouring is a substance that is not eaten as food but is added for some purpose - in this case to change the original colour of the finished product.

The purpose of food colouring is to

* even out the colour of foods exposed to light, air, moisture or temperature fluctuations,
* intensify the natural colour of the food
* colourless food or food of a different colour from that intended to be used

i.e. it is essentially intended to make the finished product more "like" itself, or as similar in appearance as possible to the consumer's existing perception of the food or the visual effect it is intended to achieve.

1.) **What can I use to colour my food**?

There is a specific list of substances that can be used to colour food and it is also specified in which foods and food groups each colouring agent can be used.

Some foods (e.g. oil, raw meat) are not allowed to be coloured, as this would prevent the actual quality of the food (e.g. spoiled) from being determined.

In addition, the use of a food colouring additive requires prior approval by EFSA (European Food Safety Authority).

2) **How much of the colouring can I use**?

The amount of a given colouring that can be used is also specified.

When considering the use of colourings, EFSA has assessed the amount that is safe for human health to consume over a lifetime.

EFSA sets the maximum level below the level that does not pose a significant health risk in experiments, including animal studies, i.e. below the total daily intake.

There are also some colours for which, until there is sufficient evidence of the maximum amount that can be consumed, EFSA sets a temporary value based on a lower use level for safety.

3.) **Are there dangerous colourings**?

Some colourings have been shown to be harmful, if not harmful, then at least potentially harmful to health when consumed in excess, according to current studies.

Therefore, for certain colours, there should be a special warning on the packaging (e.g. consumption may cause adverse effects on children).

However, it is also possible that although the colourant is authorised, EFSA itself may issue a statement on the colourant or group of substances/chemical compounds that warns against their use, so it is worth keeping an eye on the latest test results.

In particular, attention is focused on so-called genotoxicity, i.e. the potential effect of a substance (e.g. tartrazine (E 102)) on the human genome.

Consideration should also be given to the potential health effects of the combination of certain colours and other additives on the human body, which are not covered by the list of authorised colours or the permitted levels.

The use of additives requires preparation and thought.

4.) **Can colourings only be used in food?**

Food colourings are also used for other purposes, such as stamping eggs, where the colouring may enter the food directly.

There are also colourings that are added to animal food - but that is a separate issue.

5) **How is a new colouring added to the list?**

A colouring agent that qualifies as an additive may be added to the list following an EU authorisation process and an EFSA review.

The list was updated by EFSA in 2016, meaning that today's list only includes colourings that have been reviewed and found to be safe for health, and substances that have since been newly authorised.

If you want to know what colourings have been taken off the list, it is worth checking before you start the authorisation process - there were some colourings on the list that were authorised decades ago.

6) **Are all food colours additives**?

Substances that are legally referred to as food colours are always additives, so they are subject to additive and other food law requirements.

7) **How can I avoid the use of colour additives?**

There are so-called colouring foods (e.g. beetroot) that can be used to achieve the desired colour effect - whether such foods can be used depends on the recipe, but there are also neutral-tasting colouring foods.