Artificial Food Dyes and Kids: Not a Good Mix

(DrFrankLipman.com – Robyn O'Brien) A report released by the National Cancer Institute showed a 9.4% increase in childhood cancer between 1992 and 2007. And today, cancer is now the leading cause of death by disease in kids under the age of fifteen.

Correlation is not causation, but the escalating rates of conditions like cancer, diabetes and food allergies have a lot of parents paying attention to what is in their food. Some cancer doctors even call it the "doorknob syndrome." A patient is diagnosed with cancer, spends hours in the office being walked through procedure options, then as they turn to go, with a hand on the doorknob, turn back into the office and ask, "Is there anything I could be doing differently with my diet?"

We are quickly learning that our food is full of a lot of non-food ingredients.

About 15 million pounds of petroleum-based dyes are used in food each year. And a certain kind of red food coloring, known as "Red 3," is a known carcinogen that the FDA banned from our medicines and makeup in 1990, but it's still used in our foods.

But instead of making the long overdue move to do something serious about getting rid of toxic food dyes so ubiquitous in our food supply, dyes derived from synthetic chemicals that studies have linked to cancer, the FDA, upon learning this, fell back on two simple words: "more research."

In kitchens across this country, eight dyes, currently being used by manufacturers, can be found in everything from packaged macaroni and cheese to breakfast cereal to

practically every piece of candy your child has ever put in his or her mouth. Links are being found to hyperactivity in kids (ADHD), cancer and serious food allergies.

But here is the truly amazing thing, and for those of us who have fed our kids these color-laden foods, perhaps the toughest thing to stomach: Kraft, Coca Cola and Wal-Mart have already removed these artificial food colors and dyes from the same products that they distribute in other countries. Skittles? Don't have them. M&Ms? Don't have them either. Neither do cereals, fruit snacks and just about any food you'd think to put in a kids mouth. They did it in response to consumer demand and an extraordinary study called the Southampton Study.

The Southampton Study was unusual in that it tested children on a combination of two ingredients: tartrazine (yellow #5) and sodium benzoate. The study's designers knew that a child very rarely has occasion to ingest just a synthetic color or just a preservative; rather, a child who is gobbling up multicolored candies is probably taking in several colors and at least one preservative.

What's amazing is that in the U.K., the federal food safety agency actually funded the Southampton Study that led to even U.S. corporations eliminating synthetic colors and sodium benzoate from their U.K. products.

And in response, a whole host of companies, including the U.K. branches of Wal-Mart, Kraft, Coca Cola and the Mars candy company (who make M&Ms), have voluntarily removed artificial colors, the preservative sodium benzoate, and even aspartame from their products. Particularly those marketed to kids. Take a close look at the ingredient list for the product below.

Our American companies had removed these harmful ingredients from their products overseas – but not here.

Kraft, Coca Cola and Wal-Mart are living proof that it is possible for giant corporations to make and sell kid-friendly, family-friendly, and healthy processed food without necessarily exposing them to a chemical cocktail that might also give them allergic reactions, brain tumors, or leukemia, or the symptoms of ADHD, as the Center for Science in the Public Interest recently highlighted in their report *Rainbow of Risks*.

Is it too much to ask the FDA and the processed food companies for the same value to be placed on the lives of the American kids in their cost-benefit analyses that has been placed on the lives of kids in the UK?

We can create that same change here. There are apparently 51 million moms waking up to the dangers that toxins present to the health of our kids, that number is the equivalent to the entire population of Spain. And if what is happening in this food movement or the changing landscape of childhood health is any indication, it is time to get down to business, level the playing field for our kids, and send a message to these companies. We can navigate the grocery store a little bit differently, share information with friends and family or even reach out online to our favorite food companies asking them to support this change. Because while the American children only represent 30% of our population, they are 100% of our future. So while the FDA may not value their lives accordingly, we can.