Parents’ Testimony of Children’s Sensitivity to Food Dyes

We noticed that my daughter's behavior was getting to be terrible as summer went on. She would burst into screaming tears at the slightest provocation. She is normally very good at controlling her emotions and thinking logically, but it was getting to point of doubting her sanity. She also stopped wanting to do active things, preferring to sit around and watch television or read instead of play. Because she had had many food allergies as an infant, including to the purple dye they used to put in Zyrtec, we became suspicious. We cut out all the artificial colors (mostly Kool-Aid, we otherwise eat pretty close to organic) and she is much calmer and is more successful at controlling her emotions. She even claims she feels different, but can't explain exactly how. We have confirmed it by re-introducing the dyes on occasion. Dyes = emotional distress... It takes about two days for the emotional response to diminish, and the emotional response seems proportional to the amount of dye consumed, unlike her previous allergies.

J.U., Ohio

Child has jumped out of a moving car after having red food dye at school without my permission or knowledge until after the fact. She has been violent - kicking with significant force at adults. She has major mood swings, going from hysterical laughter to maniacal screaming and crying - often simultaneously having laughter suddenly change to tears or vice versa - all directly linked to the consumption of any bit of food dye.

S.B., Illinois

My daughter is highly sensitive to food dyes (especially Yellow 5, Yellow 6, Blue 1, Red 40), and can change from being able to sit and read quietly or do a whole page of addition problems to not being able to sit at all, sometimes running in circles uncontrollably when she is exposed to these food dyes. She cannot concentrate long enough to read simple words or follow multi-step instructions. e have avoided dyes for the last two years, as much as we have been able to, and Rachel has become a much calmer child, able to concentrate longer and follow directions better. She no longer has episodes of uncontrollably running in circles around the house.

We have also had behavioral problems with BHT, TBHQ, and BHA. These cause a separate, distinct reaction in which she has sleep disturbances, anxiety, fits of rage, and leg muscle cramps.

A.E., New Mexico

My son becomes hyper and very agitated when he eats foods that have added food dyes. As a result I have stopped buying yogurt, cereal bars, and other items that contain food dyes. Instead I buy only plain yogurt and cereal and add fresh fruit. I now go to the health food store and search for items that have only natural ingredients, and I no longer allow him to "buy" breakfast at school since they often serve "Nutrigrain" cereal bars and cereals that add artificial colors.

C.G., Pennsylvania

Hyperactivity, inability to concentrate, lowered word-retrieval ability, argumentative. When he does not have foods with dyes, he is generally easy-going, can concentrate until frustrated, has a rich and colorful vocabulary (based on age) and can discuss issues or disagreements with us (his parents) instead of arguing. It is definitely dyes. I've done diet restrictions on different foods and found when foods with dye are added back into his diet, we see negative behaviors introduce or increase.
T.H., Wisconsin

[My child] becomes very disoriented, confused and frustrated after consuming foods with artificial food coloring. He is unable to focus and prone to extremely angry outbursts resulting in a complete loss of control - violently striking out and screaming uncontrollably. He has been diagnosed as ADHD; however, all of his symptoms are almost non-existent when he does not consume dyes. He has also shown a sensitivity to preservatives used in hot dogs and cold cuts.

N.M., New Jersey

Our son does a complete turn in behavior. He becomes defiant, violent (hitting, kicking, spitting,) cannot concentrate on an activity and extreme mood swings...from crying to laughing w/in a minute of each other. Punishment doesn't phase him. He'd sit in time-out all day and cry but as soon as he was out of time out it's back to the irrational behaviors then back in time-out...a vicious circle.

After removing the dyes, red #40 being the main one, he's back to our sweet little boy. We check ingredients in everything. Even a small mint w/red stripes on it affects his behavior, so he's very limited in foods that he can have. He didn't have a lot of artificial dyes before, it was being on a Rx medicine that helped us discover this reaction, but now the small amount of foods he did have w/artificial dyes have been removed. And if he gets even a little bit of those dyes in his system it's very apparent. His little body just can't handle them.

T.A., South Carolina

When my daughter was 3 she attended an Easter Egg hunt and ate tons of colored jelly beans. This resulted in FULL BODY HIVES and difficulty breathing and we had to rush her to the emergency room. She was fine but afterwards we noticed when she'd eat colored foods she would get a return of the hives. We eliminated all artificial colors that we could and we were actually AMAZED at the behavior improvements in both her AND her 5 year old brother. Within a matter of days they were relaxed, easy to talk to and their tantrums and outbursts pretty much went away. They are now 14 & 17 and both of them still react when they eat junk food away from home by getting mood swings and becoming restless and fidgety.

D.W., Colorado

Hyperactivity. Attention deficit. This problem started showing up early in life- noticed she was "busier" than other children at about 2-3... Now, I knew that she was affected by food dyes by a process of elimination-totally eliminated them, then added back to diet.

L.A.S., New York

Certain artificial food dyes cause severe hyperactivity in my younger son. We try to keep him on a dye free diet, but it is becoming more and more difficult. The doctor wanted to put him on medication for ADHD!... When he consumes dyes it's like he is being controlled by a motor and can't stop. He even speaks so quickly that he's very hard to understand!

G.D., New Jersey
My child gets very irritable and hits a lot when he has synthetic dyes. Just last week I had to give him antibiotics that had a red color. This lovely child turned into a monster. He couldn't control himself. Once he was off the medicine, he was fine. I've seen this behaviour also when he has eaten any candy or cereal with artificial dyes. I now never buy anything that has artificial coloring.

D.H., California

Tantrums, itching, agitation, rage, irrational thinking, compulsive picking at itchy skin to the point of scabbing & scarring, oppositional behavior, disturbed sleep, joint pain, aggression, inability to focus, and more... All above symptoms are completely gone [when avoiding dyes]. MSG is also problematic, although not as severely.

G.M., Rhode Island

Excitability. At a very young age [my child] would point to certain candies and foods containing dyes and would say "I can't have those bc they make me bounce off the wall."

T.L., Alabama

Extreme hyperness, crankiness, general really bad mood. These symptoms went TOTALLY away [from avoiding dyes]. Artificial preservatives may cause some issues, but artificial dyes are a definite.

S.R., Maryland

She is a very easy-going child who grew up in a house with no food dyes. If she eats it outside the home, she is stubborn, obstinate and tantruming, which is a complete change in her personality. (she will go months with no food dyes and no tantrums), the tantrums are clearly connected to the food dye.

H.H., New Jersey

Hyperactivity - Out of control behavior. If I give [my daughter] a typical children's food item that is loaded with dyes, it is like a switch is turned on and she becomes this out of control machine.

D.P., Florida