

What's Really in Their Snacks?

A Parent's Guide to Food Dyes, Behavior, and Healthier Swaps



How Artificial Colors Could Be Impacting Your Child—and What to Choose Instead

by Vanessa Moyers

Why Food Dyes Deserve a Closer Look

Artificial food dyes are more than just bright colors added to snacks—they're synthetic chemicals derived from petroleum. While they're commonly found in cereals, candy, drinks, and even vitamins, mounting research shows that they may be doing more harm than good—especially for neurodivergent children.

For kids with ADHD, autism, or sensory processing differences, food dyes have been linked to increased hyperactivity, emotional dysregulation, and challenges with focus and behavior. The American Academy of Pediatrics and CDC have acknowledged growing concern about the neurological impact of these additives.



How Food Dyes Affect the Brain?

1. Disrupting Neurotransmitters

Certain dyes—like Red 40 and Yellow 5—may interfere with neurotransmitter activity in the brain. Neurotransmitters like dopamine and serotonin play a crucial role in mood, attention, and impulse control. When disrupted, children may experience:

- Increased impulsivity
- Emotional outbursts
- Restlessness or "bouncing off the walls"

2. Triggering Inflammation

Some studies suggest that food dyes may promote low-grade inflammation in the brain, which can worsen symptoms of ADHD and anxiety. For children already navigating sensory overload or communication challenges, this added inflammation can create behavioral spikes.

3. Mimicking or Amplifying Allergy Reactions

Red 40, Yellow 5, and Yellow 6 are known to release histamines in some children, which can lead to:

- Itchy skin
- Irritability
- Headaches
- "Brain fog" and zoning out

Where These Dyes Are Hiding

Even if you avoid candy or soda, food dyes can be hiding in unexpected places:

- Fruit snacks (like Welch's, Mott's, and store brands)
- Yogurt tubes with bright swirls or mix-ins
- Mac & cheese (especially boxed with characters)
- Cereal with marshmallows or rainbow shapes
- Flavored applesauce or fruit cups with added color
- Frosted or sprinkle-covered toaster pastries
- Multivitamins, gummy supplements, and toothpaste

Swap Smart: Realistic Replacements for Picky Eaters

We all know picky eaters often stick to foods with familiar flavors, textures, and colors. The good news? There are dye-free options that keep things fun and functional.



If they love... Fruit Snacks

Try instead:

- Annie's Organic Bunny Fruit Snacks - Naturally colored with juice
- YumEarth Fruit Snacks - Allergy-friendly and dye-free
- That's It. Fruit Bars - Just fruit. That's it.

If they love... Yogurt Tubes

Try instead:

- Stonyfield Organic Kids Yogurt Tubes - No artificial colors
- Siggis Kids Yogurt Pouches - High protein, low sugar
- DIY: Blend plain yogurt with fruit puree and freeze into DIY tubes

If they love... Mac & Cheese

Try instead:

- Annie's Organic Mac & Cheese - Turmeric and paprika for color
- Goodles Mac & Cheese - Cleaner ingredients, kid-friendly packaging
- DIY: Elbow noodles + shredded cheddar + milk = Done

If they love... Bright Cereal

Try instead:

- Barbara's Puffins - Crunchy, mildly sweet, no dyes
- Cascadian Farm Organic Cereal - Fun shapes, better ingredients
- Cheerios or Kix (original versions) - Familiar and safe

If they love... Sports Drinks & Colorful Juice

Try instead:

- Hint Kids Water - Naturally fruit-infused, no color
- Honest Kids Juice Pouches - Dye-free, low sugar
- DIY: Mix coconut water with frozen berries or oranges for color and flavor

If they love... Candy & Treats

Try instead:

- Unreal Chocolate Gems - Candy-coated without artificial dyes
- Smart Sweets - Lower sugar, dye-free gummies
- ZolliPops - Great for oral health too!

If they use... Colorful Toothpaste or Vitamins

Try instead:

- Hello Kids Fluoride Toothpaste - Fun flavors, no dyes
- Tom's of Maine or Burt's Bees Kids Toothpaste - Simple and safe
- Mary Ruth Organics or Llama Naturals Gummies - Dye-free supplements



How to Start Without Overwhelm

1. Pick one category (snacks, drinks, cereal) and focus there
2. Compare labels side-by-side and choose a cleaner option
3. Get your child involved - Let them help choose a new option
4. Explain it in simple terms - "This one helps your brain feel calm"
5. Celebrate small wins - Each swap matters

Final Encouragement

You don't have to be perfect to make a difference. You just have to start.

Our kids—especially those with unique needs—deserve fuel that helps them feel regulated, focused, and strong. If reducing dyes brings a little more peace to your day, it's absolutely worth it.

✨ You've got this, Mama.



Thank You So Much for Being Here!

You're not just a mama who downloaded a free guide—you're a mama taking intentional steps to create a calmer, healthier life for your family. And that's something worth celebrating.

Whether you're cutting back on food dyes, swapping out your skincare, learning about screen-free toys, or just trying to stay afloat while raising neurodivergent kids—I see you. And I'm cheering you on every step of the way.

If you found this guide helpful, I'd love to keep in touch. You'll find me sharing tips, stories, and support on social—come say hi! 💜



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You've got this, Mama!! I've got you!

XO Vanessa XO

