Flavored water enhancers? Bad for you? [1]

Dear Alice,

Is Mio (water enhancer) bad for you?

Answer

Dear Reader,

Oh MiO my? what?s the deal with water enhancers?! Seeing unfamiliar ingredients on a label can be alarming, and things can get heated among food safety researchers when it comes to items with added flavors and sweeteners, like MiO. First and foremost, ingredients in water enhancers are approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for use in food products, so there?s no funny business there. On top of that, there?s a lot of information floating around out there about water enhancers, leading to lots of confusion for consumers who are just looking to spice up the way they stay hydrated!

For those unfamiliar, water enhancers, like Mio, are liquids that can be added to plain ol? water to enhance taste. Common ingredients include sugars, various flavorings, and artificial colors. So, is it safe? While these ingredients are FDA-approved and found in many foods and beverages, there are a few ingredients that may potentially impact your health:

- **Propylene glycol** serves as a solvent in items with added colors and flavors. It?s also used in some paints and plastics, which raises some eyebrows about its safety. Enough studies have demonstrated its safety that the FDA and other organizations have deemed it A-OK for use, as long as it doesn?t exceed five percent of your daily intake (which would be a very, very large amount!). Such extreme doses have led to kidney damage in other species, but a squirt of a water enhancer has just a tiny fraction of that amount.

- **Sucralose** is an artificial sweetener 600 times sweeter than table sugar. The FDA reviewed over 100 studies and has concluded that it?s safe to eat. However, some watchdog groups say ?not so fast!? because of reports of negative effects in rodents (leukemia and effects on the thymus gland). Although lots of evidence says sucralose is safe for humans, these animal studies may lead some to prefer to shy away from it. You can read Sucralose (Splenda) [2] to find out more!

- **Acesulfame potassium (a.k.a., ?Ace-K?)**, an artificial sweetener that?s 200 times sweeter than sugar, was also approved as safe by the FDA after a review of nearly 100 studies. But, some food safety advocates have pointed out that a lot of those studies were done back in the 70s and had some serious design flaws.
• **Artificial colors** are used in a huge variety of foods and beverages, and each one ranks differently in terms of safety. A few key points: Blue-1 and Yellow-5 can cause allergic reactions in some people and it’s suspected that some dyes may cause hyperactivity in some children; more research on the safety of the dyes is needed, as they are so commonly used.

A few servings of a water enhancer (used as instructed on the label) are unlikely to expose you to enough of these ingredients to cause harm. As they say, everything in moderation. Water enhancers also have many potential benefits – like keeping you hydrated and helping you avoid sugary drinks like sodas. Making a decision about a water enhancer may come down to weighing the pros and cons of what matters most to you. Would you prefer items without added flavors and colors? Do you go for plain white sugar over artificial sugars? How important is it to you that ingredients are organic? You could also explore the many other ways to diversify your hydration choices: seltzer or infused water are just a couple of the many water-enhancing alternatives available. Happy hydrating!

Alice!

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