

CONSUMER RISING

The Label Decoder

99 ingredients to watch — and the exact words to look for on the label, in plain language.

“Know what goes into your body.”

How to use this guide

You don't need to memorize 99 ingredients. You need to recognize the handful that matter most — right there in the grocery aisle.

1

Start with Avoid

These 20 are the ones with the most serious questions around them. Learn these first; the rest can wait.

2

Use the “Look for” line

Every entry lists the exact label words — aliases, E-numbers, trade names — so you can match what you see on the package.

3

Scan, don't memorize

Pair this guide with the free Consumer Rising label scanner: point your phone at any ingredients panel and it flags these automatically.

THE FIVE LEVELS

AVOID

The ingredients with the most serious questions around them — the ones worth learning first.

CAUTION

Strong reasons to be careful. Worth limiting or skipping when you have a choice.

CERTAIN PEOPLE SHOULD AVOID

Fine for most people — but specific groups (kids, pregnant women, people with certain conditions) should steer clear.

CUT BACK

Not poisons — dose problems. Fine in small amounts; the trouble is how much of them modern food contains.

LOWER CONCERN

Lower on the worry list — included so you can recognize the names and move on.

These levels are Consumer Rising's editorial judgment, not medical advice. Every entry links to a full dossier with primary sources at consumerrising.com/ingredients.

AVOID

The ingredients with the most serious questions around them — the ones worth learning first.

Acesulfame Potassium (Ace-K)

AVOID

SWEETENER · E950

Look for: Acesulfame Potassium, Acesulfame-K, Ace-K, Sunett, E950

A calorie-free sweetener found in diet sodas, sugar-free baked goods, and other 'diet' products. It is FDA-approved, but CSPI rates it Avoid — and a large 2022 French cohort linked higher intake to higher coronary heart disease risk, a signal worth knowing about but not proof of harm.

Aspartame

AVOID

SWEETENER · E951

Look for: E951, NutraSweet, Equal

The sweetener in most diet sodas and sugar-free gum. In 2023 the WHO's cancer agency called it 'possibly carcinogenic' — while other expert groups disagreed.

Azodicarbonamide (ADA)

AVOID

DOUGH CONDITIONER · E927A

Look for: azodicarbonamide, ADA, azobisformamide (related), E927a, E927

The 'yoga mat chemical' — a dough conditioner that makes bread rise higher and fluffier, best known from the 2014 campaign that got Subway to drop it. When baked, it breaks down into semicarbazide.

BHA

AVOID

ANTIOXIDANT · E320

Look for: Butylated hydroxyanisole, E320

A preservative that keeps fats in chips, cereal, and gum from going stale. Listed as 'reasonably anticipated to be a human carcinogen' in the US.

Blue 1 (Brilliant Blue)

AVOID

ARTIFICIAL DYE · E133

Look for: Blue 1, Brilliant Blue, Brilliant Blue FCF, FD&C Blue No. 1, E133

The blue in candy, sports drinks, and baked goods — often mixed with yellows to make green. It carries the same class-level concerns as the other synthetic dyes, but the honest truth is that Blue 1 has thinner dye-specific research than the yellows and reds.

Brominated Vegetable Oil (BVO)

AVOID

EMULSIFIER · E443

Look for: BVO, E443

Used to keep citrus flavor mixed in some sodas and sports drinks. The FDA revoked its authorization for use in food in 2024.

Olestra (Olean)

AVOID

FAT SUBSTITUTE

Look for: Olean, Sucrose polyester

A lab-made fat that slides through the body undigested — the 'fat-free' frying oil behind 1990s WOW! chips. It tastes like fat, but your body can't absorb it.

Partially Hydrogenated Oils

AVOID

FAT

Look for: PHOs, Partially hydrogenated soybean oil, Shortening (some)

The main source of artificial trans fat. The FDA gave the industry until 2020 to remove them — but label loopholes mean traces can remain.

Potassium Bromate

AVOID

DOUGH CONDITIONER · E924

Look for: Bromated flour, E924

A flour additive that makes bread rise higher and look whiter. Removed from EU food years ago — still allowed in the US.

Potassium Iodate

AVOID

DOUGH CONDITIONER

Look for: KIO3

A chemical dough strengthener used in some American breads — the less-famous cousin of potassium bromate. It makes dough rise taller and hold its shape.

Propyl Gallate

AVOID

ANTIOXIDANT · E310

Look for: propyl gallate, E310

An antioxidant that protects fats and oils in meat products, frozen foods, and candy — usually teamed up with BHA and BHT. EWG calls it an ingredient of concern and recommends limiting it.

Red 3 (Erythrosine)

AVOID

ARTIFICIAL DYE · E127

Look for: Red 3, Erythrosine, FD&C Red No. 3, Red No. 3, E127

The bright cherry-red dye in candy, frostings, and baked goods — and the additive behind the biggest US food-dye regulatory action in decades. In January 2025 the FDA revoked its authorization for food, but be clear-eyed about why: the decision was a matter of law, not new evidence of human harm.

Red 40

ARTIFICIAL DYE · E129

AVOID

Look for: Allura Red AC, E129, FD&C Red No. 40

One of the most widely used artificial colors in US food — candy, drinks, cereals, and snacks. It makes food look bright red or orange.

Saccharin

SWEETENER · E954

AVOID

Look for: Saccharin, Sweet'N Low, sodium saccharin, E954

A zero-calorie artificial sweetener with a long, instructive history: a 1970s rat bladder-cancer scare put warning labels on every packet, then the mechanism turned out to be rat-only and the labels came off in 2000.

Sodium Nitrite & Sodium Nitrate

PRESERVATIVE · E250

AVOID

Look for: Sodium Nitrite, Sodium Nitrate, E250, E251, E249 (Potassium Nitrite), E252 (Potassium Nitrate), celery powder, celery juice powder, cultured celery juice

The preservatives that keep bacon pink, hot dogs shelf-stable, and deli meat free of botulism. They do a real food-safety job — but in the body's acid stomach environment, nitrite can convert into nitrosamines, and IARC classifies ingested nitrite under nitrosating conditions as probably carcinogenic to humans (Group 2A).

Sucralose

SWEETENER · E955

AVOID

Look for: Sucralose, Splenda, E955

The sweetener sold as Splenda, spread across the 'sugar-free' aisle — diet drinks, gum, baked goods, and tabletop packets. Two independent 2022 studies raised flags: a large French cohort linked it to coronary heart disease risk, and a human trial found it disrupted gut bacteria and blood-sugar response.

TBHQ (Tertiary Butylhydroquinone)

AVOID

ANTIOXIDANT · E319

Look for: TBHQ, tertiary butylhydroquinone, tert-butylhydroquinone, t-butylhydroquinone, E319

The preservative that keeps crackers, potato products, and oil-heavy baked goods from going rancid — EWG found it in over 2,700 packaged foods. Human data on its effects is essentially absent, which is itself the point.

Titanium Dioxide

AVOID

COLOR · E171

Look for: E171, CI 77891

Makes candy, frosting, and coffee creamer look bright white. The EU banned it as a food additive in 2022 after EFSA's safety review.

Yellow 5

AVOID

ARTIFICIAL DYE · E102

Look for: Tartrazine, E102, FD&C Yellow No. 5

The bright yellow dye in candy, drinks, chips, and even some medicines. It carries the same EU child-attention warning as Red 40.

Yellow 6 (Sunset Yellow)

AVOID

ARTIFICIAL DYE · E110

Look for: Yellow 6, Sunset Yellow, Sunset Yellow FCF, FD&C Yellow No. 6, E110

One of the most widely used dyes in US candy, sodas, and snacks. California's 2021 OEHHA review — the most rigorous assessment of dyes and children to date — found synthetic dyes can worsen neurobehavioral problems in some children, and that the FDA's intake limits may not protect kids.

CAUTION

Strong reasons to be careful. Worth limiting or skipping when you have a choice.

Advantame

SWEETENER · E969

CAUTION

Look for: E969, INS 969

Aspartame's chemical cousin — 20,000 to 37,000 times sweeter than sugar, FDA-approved in 2014. A speck sweetens a whole batch, and it's barely a decade into its real-world track record.

BHT (Butylated Hydroxytoluene)

ANTIOXIDANT · E321

CAUTION

Look for: BHT, butylated hydroxytoluene, butylhydroxytoluene, E321

A synthetic antioxidant that keeps fats and oils in cereals, snack foods, and packaged goods from going rancid. It holds a spot on EWG's Dirty Dozen list of additives to avoid — though the case against it is precautionary, not proven.

Blue 2

ARTIFICIAL DYE · E132

CAUTION

Look for: Blue 2, FD&C Blue No. 2, indigotine, E132

One of the less-studied synthetic blue dyes, used in candy, drinks, baked goods, and pet food. It carries the class-level concerns behind all synthetic dyes without much dye-specific data of its own.

Brazzein

SWEETENER

CAUTION

Look for: Brazzein-53, Mellia brazzein, Oubli fruit protein

A sweet protein from the West African oubli fruit, now brewed by engineered yeast. Zero-calorie and hundreds of times sweeter than sugar — and brand new to the food supply.

Caramel Color III & IV

CAUTION

COLOR · E150C

Look for: caramel color, caramel colour, caramel coloring, caramel colouring, ammonia caramel (related), sulfite ammonia caramel (related), E150c, E150d

The brown in colas, soy sauce, and baked goods — the most widely used coloring in food by weight. Only the ammonia-processed kinds (Classes III and IV) carry the contaminant 4-MEI.

Carboxymethylcellulose

CAUTION

THICKENER · E466

Look for: Carboxymethylcellulose, cellulose gum, sodium carboxymethylcellulose, E466

A thickener and emulsifier that gives ice cream its body and keeps baked goods and sauces smooth — backed by two independent lines of cautionary evidence.

Carrageenan

CAUTION

THICKENER · E407

Look for: E407, Irish moss (source)

A thickener from red seaweed in chocolate milk, ice cream, and plant milks. Lab research raised gut-inflammation questions; regulators say current uses look safe.

Diacetyl

CAUTION

FLAVORING

Look for: diacetyl, 2,3-butanedione, artificial butter flavor, artificial butter flavoring

The chemical behind the butter flavor in microwave popcorn and many baked goods — the one behind 'popcorn lung.'

Interesterified Oils

CAUTION

FAT

Look for: interesterified soybean oil, interesterified palm oil, interesterified oils

The industry's quiet replacement for trans fats in margarines, baked goods, and confectionery — made by chemically rearranging which fatty acids sit on the fat molecule.

Liquid smoke

CAUTION

FLAVORING

Look for: Pyroligneous acid, Smoke flavoring, Smoke flavouring, Natural smoke flavor

Real wood smoke, captured as a liquid — the shortcut to BBQ flavor in sauces, chips, and bacon bits. The EU just banned several versions over DNA-damage concerns.

Monk Fruit Extract

CAUTION

SWEETENER

Look for: Monk fruit, Luo Han Guo, Mogrosides

A zero-calorie sweetener from a small green melon grown in southern China. Its sweetness comes from compounds called mogrosides — no sugar, no calories.

Mono- and Diglycerides of Fatty Acids

CAUTION

EMULSIFIER · E471

Look for: Mono- and diglycerides, monoglycerides, distilled monoglycerides, mono- & diglycerides of edible fats or oils, E471

One of the most widely consumed emulsifiers in processed food — it keeps cakes, biscuits, mayonnaise, and other fats and sauces smooth and shelf-stable.

Neotame

SWEETENER · E961

CAUTION

Look for: Newtame, E961

Aspartame's chemical cousin — 7,000 to 13,000 times sweeter than sugar, approved in 2002. A pinch does the work of a spoonful, and unlike aspartame it survives baking heat.

Parabens (Propylparaben & Methylparaben)

PRESERVATIVE · E216

CAUTION

Look for: propylparaben, propyl paraben, methylparaben, methyl paraben, propyl p-hydroxybenzoate (related), E216, E218

Antimicrobial preservatives in tortillas, muffins, and some processed meats — the same chemical family used in cosmetics. Europe banned propylparaben from food in 2006; the US never did.

Polysorbate 80

EMULSIFIER · E433

CAUTION

Look for: Polysorbate 80, polysorbate-80, tween 80, polyoxyethylene (20) sorbitan monooleate, E433

An emulsifier used in ice cream, baked goods, and creamy sauces — and one of two emulsifiers tested in a much-discussed 2015 mouse study on gut inflammation.

Sodium Aluminum Phosphate

LEAVENING ACID · E541

CAUTION

Look for: sodium aluminum phosphate, SALP, E541

The leavening acid in self-rising flour, baking powder, cake mixes, and processed cheese. It is one of the main food-additive sources of dietary aluminum.

Thaumatococcus

SWEETENER · E957

CAUTION

Look for: Thaumatococcus II, Katemfe fruit extract, E957

An intensely sweet protein from a West African fruit. In the US it is mostly used as a flavor modifier rather than a sweetener — a quirk of how the rules were written, not of the science.

Transglutaminase ("Meat Glue")

PROCESSING AID

CAUTION

Look for: Meat glue, TG enzyme, Microbial transglutaminase, mTG

An enzyme that glues proteins together — it can bind meat scraps into a steak-like cut and thicken yogurt. Chefs nicknamed it 'meat glue.'

CERTAIN PEOPLE SHOULD AVOID

Fine for most people — but specific groups (kids, pregnant women, people with certain conditions) should steer clear.

Annatto

COLOR · E160B

CERTAIN PEOPLE SHOULD AVOID

Look for: Annatto, Annatto extract, Bixin, Norbixin, E160b

The yellow-orange in cheddar, butter, and snack crackers — made from the seeds of the achiote tree. Natural, but with a reaction history worth knowing about.

Artificial Flavors

FLAVORING

CERTAIN PEOPLE SHOULD AVOID

Look for: Artificial flavors, Artificial flavor, Artificial flavoring

A catch-all label word for flavor chemicals made in a lab rather than pulled from food — and you usually cannot tell what is actually inside it.

Carmine

COLOR · E120

CERTAIN PEOPLE SHOULD AVOID

Look for: Carmine, Cochineal extract, Cochineal, Carminic acid, Natural Red 4, E120

A pink-to-red color made from the cochineal insect — the 'natural' color with a documented, if rare, severe-allergy risk.

Celery powder / celery juice

PRESERVATIVE

CERTAIN PEOPLE SHOULD AVOID

Look for: Celery juice, Celery juice powder, Celery extract, Celery powder (as curing agent)

The 'natural' way to cure bacon, ham, and hot dogs. Celery is fermented or dried into a powder or juice that is naturally rich in nitrite — which then does the exact same curing job as conventional curing salt.

Erythritol

SWEETENER · E968

CERTAIN PEOPLE SHOULD AVOID

Look for: Erythritol, E968

A sugar alcohol marketed in keto and 'sugar-free' products as the safe sweetener — now at the center of a live scientific debate about heart risk.

Gums (guar, xanthan, locust bean...)

THICKENER

CERTAIN PEOPLE SHOULD AVOID

Look for: Guar gum, Xanthan gum, Locust bean gum, Carob bean gum, Gellan gum, Gum arabic, Acacia gum, E410, E412, E414, E415

The thickeners that make ice cream creamy, salad dressing pourable, and oat milk smooth — plant-seed and fermentation-derived fibers used across the supermarket.

HVP (hydrolyzed vegetable protein)

FLAVOR ENHANCER

CERTAIN PEOPLE SHOULD AVOID

Look for: Hydrolyzed vegetable protein, HVP, Hydrolyzed soy protein, Hydrolyzed corn protein, Hydrolyzed wheat protein

The savory depth in soups, chips, and frozen dinners — plant protein broken down to release glutamate. Not MSG itself, but it plays the same role on your tongue.

Monosodium Glutamate (MSG)

FLAVOR ENHANCER · E621

CERTAIN PEOPLE SHOULD AVOID

Look for: MSG, E621, Yeast extract (similar), Hydrolyzed protein (similar)

A flavor booster for savory food. The scare started in 1968; the science since then has been mixed and mostly reassuring at normal food levels.

Mycoprotein (Quorn)

MEAT ALTERNATIVE

CERTAIN PEOPLE SHOULD AVOID

Look for: Quorn, Fusarium venenatum

A protein grown from a fungus — the basis of Quorn's meat-free nuggets, patties, and roasts. It's mold, fermented in giant vats, then shaped and flavored like meat.

Natural Flavors

FLAVORING

CERTAIN PEOPLE SHOULD AVOID

Look for: natural flavors, natural flavoring, natural flavouring

The most common two-word mystery on US labels — a legal category, not a health claim, covering dozens of undisclosed flavor chemicals derived from natural sources.

Phosphates (incl. Phosphoric Acid)

EMULSIFIER · E338

CERTAIN PEOPLE SHOULD AVOID

Look for: phosphoric acid, sodium phosphate, sodium acid pyrophosphate, trisodium phosphate, dicalcium phosphate, E338, E339, E450, E451

A huge family of additives doing dozens of jobs — leavening baked goods, emulsifying processed cheese, adding tang to colas. One recent study found phosphate additives in 56% of products from America's top 25 food makers.

Propylene Glycol

SOLVENT · E1520

CERTAIN PEOPLE SHOULD AVOID

Look for: Propylene glycol, Propane-1,2-diol, E1520

A moisture-holding solvent that keeps cake mixes soft and carries flavors and colors evenly through food — a different chemical from the toxic antifreeze ingredient it keeps getting confused with.

Quinine

FLAVORING

CERTAIN PEOPLE SHOULD AVOID

Look for:

The bitter compound that gives tonic water its bite. It comes from cinchona tree bark — and it was once the world's main malaria drug.

Sodium Benzoate

PRESERVATIVE · E211

CERTAIN PEOPLE SHOULD AVOID

Look for: E211, Benzoic acid (related)

A preservative that keeps sodas, juices, and condiments from spoiling. Common in acidic drinks.

Sulfites

PRESERVATIVE · E220

CERTAIN PEOPLE SHOULD AVOID

Look for: Sulfites, sulfur dioxide, sodium sulfite, sodium bisulfite, sodium metabisulfite, potassium bisulfite, potassium metabisulfite, E220, E223

Preservatives that keep dried fruit bright and wine from spoiling — safe for most people, but genuinely dangerous for asthmatics and sensitive individuals.

Xylitol

SWEETENER · E967

CERTAIN PEOPLE SHOULD AVOID

Look for: Xylitol, birch sugar, E967

A sugar alcohol often derived from birch, used in sugar-free candy, 'keto-friendly' baked goods, and toothpaste — the second sugar alcohol flagged by Cleveland Clinic researchers for clotting risk.

Yeast extract (autolyzed)

FLAVOR ENHANCER

CERTAIN PEOPLE SHOULD AVOID

Look for: Autolyzed yeast extract, Bakers yeast extract, Yeast extract

The savory backbone of soups, chips, and frozen meals — yeast broken down to release its glutamate-rich insides. Not MSG itself, but it plays the same role on your tongue.

CUT BACK

Not poisons — dose problems. Fine in small amounts; the trouble is how much of them modern food contains.

Allulose

SWEETENER

CUT BACK

Look for: allulose, D-allulose, D-psicose, psicose

The new 'rare sugar' sweetener in keto products — about a tenth of sugar's calories, without the same blood-sugar spike.

Caffeine

CUT BACK

STIMULANT

Look for: 1,3,7-Trimethylxanthine

The world's most-used stimulant — in coffee, tea, cola, energy drinks, and chocolate. Fine in moderation for most adults; easy to overdo without noticing.

Dextrose

CUT BACK

SWEETENER

Look for: D-glucose, Corn sugar, Glucose

Another name for glucose — the sugar your blood carries. Made from corn starch, and everywhere sugar is.

High Fructose Corn Syrup

CUT BACK

SWEETENER

Look for: HFCS, HFCS-55, Glucose-fructose syrup, Isoglucose

A cheap liquid sweetener made from corn starch. It is the main sweetener in most American sodas and shows up in bread, ketchup, and salad dressing too.

Invert sugar

CUT BACK

SWEETENER

Look for: Inverted sugar, Trimoline

Table sugar, split in two — sucrose broken into glucose and fructose. The candy-maker's secret against graininess.

Isomalt

CUT BACK

SWEETENER · E953

Look for: E953, INS 953, Palatinit

The sugar-free candy sweetener — about half the calories of sugar, tooth-friendly, and a laxative in large amounts.

Lactitol

CUT BACK

SWEETENER · E966

Look for: E966, INS 966

The sugar alcohol in sugar-free ice cream and chocolate — less sweet than sugar, lower in calories, and a laxative in excess.

Maltitol

CUT BACK

SWEETENER · E965

Look for: Maltitol syrup, E965

The sugar alcohol behind most 'sugar-free' chocolate and candy. It's about 90% as sweet as sugar with roughly half the calories — but your blood sugar notices more than the label suggests.

Mannitol

CUT BACK

SWEETENER · E421

Look for: E421

A sugar alcohol about 60% as sweet as sugar, common in chewing gum, mints, and sugar-free candy. It's also used as a hospital IV drug — a reminder that dose is everything.

Polydextrose

CUT BACK

FIBER / BULKING AGENT

Look for: E1200, Litesse

A lab-built fiber made mostly from glucose. It adds bulk and fiber to 'reduced sugar' and 'light' foods — but your gut may notice it before your taste buds do.

Salt (Sodium Chloride)

CUT BACK

SEASONING

Look for: Sodium chloride, Table salt

The world's oldest seasoning and preservative — essential in small amounts, but most people get far more than they need, and most of it comes from packaged foods, not the salt shaker.

Sorbitol

CUT BACK

SWEETENER · E420

Look for: Sorbitol, E420, Sorbitol syrup

A sugar alcohol used to sweeten sugar-free gum, candy, and diet foods — the concern here is concrete and well documented: too much upsets your stomach.

Sugar (Sucrose)

CUT BACK

SWEETENER

Look for: Sucrose, Table sugar, Cane sugar

Table sugar — half glucose, half fructose. The body treats it much like high fructose corn syrup; the problem is the total amount, not the source.

Tagatose

CUT BACK

SWEETENER

Look for: D-tagatose, Pseudofructose

A rare sugar found in tiny amounts in dairy and fruit. It tastes about 90% as sweet as sugar with roughly a third of the calories — a newcomer still earning its track record.

Trehalose

CUT BACK

SWEETENER / STABILIZER

Look for: Mycose, Tremalose

A sugar made of two glucose molecules, found naturally in mushrooms, honey, and shrimp. It is half as sweet as sugar with the same calories — used as much for texture and stability as for sweetness.

LOWER CONCERN

Lower on the worry list — included so you can recognize the names and move on.

Acetic acid

LOWER CONCERN

ACIDULANT · E260

Look for: E260, INS 260, Ethanoic acid

The sharp acid in vinegar — also doing preservation work in pickles, sauces, and baked goods.

Beet juice / beet red

LOWER CONCERN

COLOR · E162

Look for: Beet juice, Beet powder, Beetroot red, Betanin, E162, Vegetable juice

The red in strawberry yogurt and veggie burgers that isn't a berry at all — it's beet. Betanin, the same pigment in the beet on your plate.

Beta-carotene (as color)

LOWER CONCERN

COLOR · E160A

Look for: Beta-carotene, Beta carotene, E160a, Carotenes

The orange in margarine and cheese — the same pigment that makes carrots orange. Used as a color, not a nutrient, at the tiny levels in food.

Buffered vinegar

LOWER CONCERN

PRESERVATIVE

Look for: Vinegar powder, Buffered vinegar powder, Dry vinegar

Vinegar with its sharp acidity softened by buffering salts. It slows the bacteria that spoil deli meats and prepared foods — and it can be declared on labels as simply as 'vinegar.'

Calcium Disodium EDTA

LOWER CONCERN

PRESERVATIVE · E385

Look for: Calcium disodium EDTA, Calcium disodium edetate, EDTA, E385

A preservative that works by grabbing onto stray metal ions — tiny amounts of iron and copper in food that would otherwise turn fats rancid and colors dull.

Calcium Propionate

LOWER CONCERN

PRESERVATIVE · E282

Look for: calcium propionate, E282, preservative 282

The mold inhibitor behind long-lasting bread — the quiet preservative in the bread aisle.

Citric acid

LOWER CONCERN

ACIDULANT · E330

Look for: E330, INS 330

The sour in citrus fruits — and in half the candy aisle. Also the acid keeping your canned tomatoes bright.

Cultured dextrose

LOWER CONCERN

PRESERVATIVE

Look for: Cultured sugar, Cultured corn sugar, Fermented dextrose

Sugar fermented with friendly bacteria, then dried into a powder. The fermentation creates natural acids that slow spoilage — sold to shoppers as a clean-label preservative.

DATEM

LOWER CONCERN

DOUGH CONDITIONER · E472E

Look for: DATEM, E472e, diacetyl tartaric acid esters of mono- and diglycerides

One of the most common dough conditioners in commercial bread and buns — it makes loaves rise higher, stay soft longer, and survive high-speed industrial baking.

Dimethylpolysiloxane

LOWER CONCERN

PROCESSING AID · E900

Look for: dimethylpolysiloxane, polydimethylsiloxane, PDMS, E900, silicone oil

A silicone-based anti-foaming agent that keeps hot cooking oil from foaming over — a processing aid you will likely never taste or notice.

Disodium Inosinate & Disodium Guanylate

LOWER CONCERN

FLAVOR ENHANCER · E631

Look for: disodium inosinate, disodium guanylate, E631, E627, I+G

The umami amplifiers hiding behind MSG on snack and soup labels — they make savory flavors taste several times stronger than MSG alone.

Fumaric acid

LOWER CONCERN

ACIDULANT · E297

Look for: E297, INS 297

A strong-tasting food acid used in small amounts — powdered drinks, candy, and tortillas.

Green 3

LOWER CONCERN

ARTIFICIAL DYE · E143

Look for: Green 3, Fast Green FCF, FD&C Green No. 3, E143

The quiet one of the synthetic dye family — a green color used in some candies and beverages, and not widely used at all.

Lactic acid

LOWER CONCERN

ACIDULANT · E270

Look for: E270, INS 270

The tang in yogurt and sourdough — made by fermentation, and doing quiet preservation work in packaged foods.

Malic acid

LOWER CONCERN

ACIDULANT · E296

Look for: E296, INS 296, DL-malic acid

The sharp sour in green apples and sour candy — one of the most common food acids there is.

Maltodextrin

LOWER CONCERN

THICKENER

Look for: Maltodextrin

A highly processed starch used as a filler, thickener, and carrier in everything from salad dressing to 'sugar-free' snacks.

Mixed tocopherols

LOWER CONCERN

PRESERVATIVE

Look for: Tocopherols, Vitamin E (as preservative), Tocopherol concentrate

The vitamin E compounds (alpha, beta, gamma, and delta tocopherol) pulled from vegetable oils. They keep fats and oils from going rancid — nature's version of BHT and BHA.

Natamycin

LOWER CONCERN

PRESERVATIVE · E235

Look for: Pimaricin, E235, INS 235

The reason your shredded cheese never goes green — a natural antifungal made by soil bacteria, applied to cheese surfaces to stop mold.

Nisin

LOWER CONCERN

PRESERVATIVE · E234

Look for: Nisin A, Nisaplin, E234, INS 234

A natural bacteria-killer made by fermenting milk cultures — the reason processed cheese and canned foods stay safe. One of the 'good' preservatives.

PGPR

LOWER CONCERN

EMULSIFIER · E476

Look for: PGPR, Polyglycerol polyricinoleate, E476

The reason mass-market chocolate flows smoothly into molds — an emulsifier from castor-bean fatty acids that lets makers use less cocoa butter. Hershey's added it in 2006, removed it in 2015, then brought it back.

Rosemary extract

LOWER CONCERN

PRESERVATIVE · E392

Look for: Rosemary oleoresin, E392, Extract of rosemary

A concentrated extract of the kitchen herb, rich in antioxidant compounds like carnosic acid. It keeps fats and meats from going rancid — a natural stand-in for synthetic antioxidants.

SAIB (sucrose acetate isobutyrate)

LOWER CONCERN

STABILIZER

Look for: Sucrose acetate isobutyrate, SAIB

The ingredient that replaced BVO in your citrus soda — a stabilizer that keeps flavor oils mixed into the drink instead of floating to the top.

Sodium Stearoyl Lactylate

LOWER CONCERN

EMULSIFIER · E481

Look for: sodium stearoyl lactylate, SSL, E481, sodium stearoyl-2-lactylate

DATeM's quieter partner in the bread aisle — an emulsifier that strengthens dough, softens crumb, and keeps commercial loaves fresh longer.

Sodium erythorbate

LOWER CONCERN

CURING ACCELERATOR

Look for: Erythorbic acid, Isoascorbic acid, Sodium isoascorbate

A cousin of vitamin C used in cured meats. It speeds up the pink curing color — and more importantly, helps block the formation of nitrosamines.

Sorbitan monostearate

LOWER CONCERN

EMULSIFIER · E491

Look for: Sorbitan monostearate, E491, Span 60

The emulsifier in whipped toppings, cake icing, and chocolate — keeps fat and water mixed and helps yeast rehydrate. One of the most studied emulsifiers on the shelf.

Spirulina extract

LOWER CONCERN

COLOR

Look for: Spirulina extract, Phycocyanin, Blue spirulina

The natural blue — extracted from blue-green algae. It took a Mars candy petition to get it approved, and it now colors everything from ice cream to cereal.

Stevia (steviol glycosides)

LOWER CONCERN

SWEETENER · E960

Look for: Steviol glycosides, Reb A, Rebaudioside A, Stevioside, E960

The leaf-derived sweetener in diet drinks, yogurts, and tabletop packets — many times sweeter than sugar, with no calories.

Tartaric acid

LOWER CONCERN

ACIDULANT · E334

Look for: E334, INS 334, L(+)-tartaric acid

The acid from winemaking — a byproduct of wine manufacture that ended up in baking powder and candy.

Turmeric (as color)

LOWER CONCERN

COLOR · E100

Look for: Turmeric, Turmeric oleoresin, Curcumin, E100

The yellow in mustard, pickles, and butter — ground from the rhizome of *Curcuma longa*. One of the oldest food colors in human use.

What now?

You now know the 99 names that matter most on American labels — and the exact words they hide behind. Keep this guide on your phone, or print it and keep it where you unpack groceries.

For the full story behind any ingredient — the evidence, the regulatory history, the primary sources — visit the Ingredient Index at **consumerrising.com/ingredients**. Every dossier is free, cited, and updated as the science moves.

“Know what goes into your body.”