Detect Sulfites to Protect At Home or When Eating Out

About 10 minutes after eating a hamburger and fries, if you are either sensitive or allergic to sulfites in food like 1 percent of the population, you could experience the following symptoms: an itchy throat can alert you that you may have eaten a food containing sulfites. Why would you find this when eating such regular fare as a burger and fries? Many sulfites are used to soak potatoes prior to frying to keep them from turning brown. So, if you are unsure about the potato, remember to order a baked potato rather than hash browns, fries, or any dish that involves peeling the potato first because most have been treated to prevent browning.

Most people who have this sulfite sensitivity or allergic reaction know to stay away from wine, shrimp and other foods that contain sulfites, and take note whenever he or she doesn't feel right after eating something. Who would have suspected French fries to be sulfited?

In 1985, the United States federal government banned the addition of sulfites to most fresh fruits and vegetables, though fresh-cut potatoes and dried fruits are exceptions. According to the Food and Drug Administration consumer safety officer, the reporting of sulfites and other food ingredients is voluntary so it's difficult to say just how many people may be at risk. Scientists don’t know the smallest amount of sulfites needed to provoke a reaction in a sensitive or allergic person. FDA requires food manufacturers and processors to disclose the presence of sulfiting agents on the food label if they are present in concentrations of at least 10 parts per million (that's 1 part sulfite to 100,000 parts of food--the equivalent of a drop of water in a sauna). Sulfites sprayed onto foods or in drinks because a more rapid reaction—especially for the asthmatic that has breathing problems by inhaling fumes from foods treated with sulfites.

The most severe reactions occur when sulfites are constituents of the food itself. One can develop sulfite sensitivity at any point in life. No one knows what triggers the onset of reactions. A severe reaction causes the bronchial tubes to become tight and breathing to stop.

Sulfite sensitivity can be tricky to diagnose. People may have adverse sulfite reactions and only know that it's something they ate. You can help your doctor see what foods or drinks that you have that seem to cause the problem. Undiagnosed people are at greater risk because even if they know that sulfites can cause adverse reactions, they often don't associate sulfites with their own health problems.

So, sulfites, you need t why would the food industry use sulfur-based preservatives, or sulfites? Sulfites will:

- keep light-colored fruits and vegetables, such as dried apples and dehydrated potatoes, from "browning";
- prevent "black spot" off shrimp and lobster;
- keep bacteria from growing as wine ferments;
• helps in the fermentation of yeast to condition dough;
• bleaches food starches; and
• keep some medications more stable and potent.

FDA requires that sulfites be disclosed on labels of packaged food (although manufacturers need not specify the particular agent used). This information will be included in the ingredient portion of the label, along with the function of the sulfiting agent in the food (for instance, a preservative).

Sulfites are still found in a variety of cooked and processed foods (including dehydrated or pre-cut or peeled "fresh" potatoes, baked goods, condiments, dried and glacéed fruit, jam, gravy, maraschino cherries, guacamole, molasses, shrimp, and soup mixes) and beverages (such as beer, wine, hard cider, fruit and vegetable juices, and tea).

**If you're sensitive to sulfites, you need to follow these tips:**

1: Read ingredients listing on labels for words: sulfur dioxide, sodium sulfite, sodium and potassium bisulfite, sodium and potassium metabisulfite.

2: Check the label on dried fruit. It's often preserved with sulfites. Naturally sun-dried fruit is less likely to contain sulfites.

3: Beware of the following processed foods: condiments, canned vegetables, soup mixes and baked goods.

4: Wine or beer may contain sulfites even if it's not on the label.

5: When eating out be wary of salad bars and potato products. Ask the server to check with the manager for your foods of choice for the presence of sulfites.

6: The store manager must post when foods sold unpackaged in bulk form (as with a barrel of dried fruit or loose, raw shrimp at the fresh fish counter), a sign or some other type of labeling that lists the food's ingredients on the container or at the counter so that consumers can determine whether the product was treated with a sulfiting agent.

7: Buy either organic or produce from a store where you know the produce is free of sulfites.

8: Minimize your intake of canned foods and convenience foods. Eat fresh, unprocessed foods at the deli or supermarket and ordering at a restaurant whenever possible.

9: Carry your inhaler with you when eating out if you have asthma. Asthmatics tend to be more susceptible to sulfite allergy. If you've experienced a severe reaction to sulfites in the past (such as breaking out in hives), carry an antihistamine and make
Sure you have handy injectable epinephrine, such as EpiPen, so that if you have a reaction you can stabilize your condition until you get to an emergency room.

10: Consumers who see sulfites listed on the label of a packaged food such as dried fruits, canned vegetables, guacamole, etc. should be able to deduce that the same food sold in a food service establishment would also contain sulfites. Since sulfites are added to so many foods, someone who is sensitive to the additive must not assume that a food is safe to eat.

11. He recommends these measures to avoid sulfites when buying unlabeled foods such as those sold loose or by the portion, ask the store manager or waiter to check the ingredient list on the product's original bulk-size packaging.

The government regulations can go a long way towards protecting people, but remember there's no substitute for knowledge of knowing what sulfites are, whether or not you have a sensitivity or allergy to sulfites, specific foods containing sulfites and tips to prevent reactions to sulfites says ________________ County Extension Agent – Family and Consumer Sciences.


http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/fdsulfit.html

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