

## ***Coca-Cola and other soft drinks***

from Hindustan Times...

Latest research by a British scientist shows that a preservative used in cold drinks could switch off vital parts of deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA), causing serious damage to cells particularly in children.

Sodium benzoate or E211 has been used as a preservative for decades by the 74 billion pound global carbonated drinks industry. It is used to kill yeast, bacteria, and fungi in soft drinks, jam, fruit juice and salad dressing. When mixed with vitamin C it forms benzene, a carcinogenic substance.

The preservative is also found naturally in cranberries, prunes, greengages, cinnamon, ripe cloves and apples.

Peter Piper, a molecular biology expert at Sheffield University studied the preservative and found it could damage an important part of DNA called mitochondria.

"These chemicals have the ability to cause severe damage to DNA in the mitochondria to the point that they totally inactivate it, they knock it out altogether," said Piper.

"The mitochondria consumes the oxygen to give you energy and if you damage it then the cell starts to malfunction very seriously," he said.

"And there is a whole array of diseases now being tied to damage to this part of DNA. Parkinson's and quite a lot of neuro-degenerative diseases, but above all the whole process of ageing can be caused by the damage," added Piper.

However, makers of drinks like Coca-Cola, Fanta and Diet Pepsi insisted that experts had rigorously assessed the additive before it had been approved for use.

Coca-Cola said all their ingredients have been approved as safe by the food regulatory authorities in Britain and the European Union (EU), from where they take their guidance.

A spokesman for Britvic, which makes Diet Pepsi said, "We will only use ingredients that are thoroughly tested and approved for use by the Food Standards Agency (FSA) in Britain and approved by the EU."

Piper claimed that tests on sodium benzoate carried out by the European Union and the US Food and Drug Administration were too old to

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be reliable, the online edition of the Daily Mail reported on Sunday.

"By the criteria of modern safety testing, the safety tests were inadequate," he said.

"Like all things, safety testing moves forward and you can conduct a much more rigorous safety test than you could 50 years ago. My concern is for children who are drinking large amounts," said Piper.

Norman Baker, the chairman of the British parliament's all-party environment group, endorsed Piper's call for further tests.

"Professor Piper has studied this for some years so we should be taking his concerns seriously. I will be writing to the FSA to ask them to carry out further investigation and I would advise parents to make sure there is no over-exposure to these drinks for their children," said Baker.

In India, the New Delhi based Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) had earlier tested Pepsi and Coca-Cola products and had announced that it found four toxic residues after testing 12 of their major brands.

"Some of these residues were carcinogenic," claimed CSE director Sunita Narain. As a result OF CSE's report, several states including the communist government led Kerala had banned cold drinks manufactured by Pepsi and Coca Cola in their state.