

**PENNY SAVER NEWS**

FAX: 932-5261

April 29 , 2010

BY: Mary A. Keith, Ph.D., L.D.  
Food, Nutrition and Health Agent**HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY**

5339 S. County Road 579

Seffner, FL 33584-3334

PH:(813)744-5519 x 136, FAX:744-5776  
e-mail:mkeith@ufl.edu**Real Flavors, or Artificial**

If you can manage the tiny print on food ingredient labels you might wonder why so many foods have both natural and artificial flavors. It's an excellent question, with several parts to the answer. And whether the label says 'banana flavor', 'artificial banana flavor', or 'amyl acetate', it's all the same thing! Some flavors we taste with our tongue, some we actually smell with our nose, but we identify a flavor by the same chemical no matter where it came from.

Part one of the answer to why we use artificial flavors is that we simply don't have enough natural flavor. When you stop to consider all the things that are strawberry flavored for example, it includes everything from a PopTart® to lip balm, cereal to shampoo, room air fresheners to cookies. We don't, we can't, raise enough strawberries to flavor all of those millions of pounds of foods and other items. If we took all the strawberries and extracted their few drops of flavoring from each one, we'd have tons of waste material, no fresh berries to eat, and use an awful lot of energy doing it. Plus, some of the fruits we want flavors from are very hard to grow, might be endangered, or are very hard to ship. So some artificial flavoring is necessary.

It's important to recognize that those few main ingredients in artificial flavors are identical to those in natural flavors. They are exactly the same chemicals whether they were squeezed, extracted, purified and concentrated from a fresh fruit, or made in a lab from some vinegar, starch or alcohol. Some artificial flavors are made by yeast or bacteria growing in huge vats of broth. Some are made by machine.

Another reason for using artificial flavoring is that many of them are more stable. Fresh, natural flavors have dozens if not hundreds of ingredients. Usually only a couple of them are dominant. That means that if we just taste or smell one or two of the ingredients we can identify it as 'a banana', or 'a strawberry'. All of those ingredients in the natural flavor help to make it taste better. But some of them are likely to break down in storage. So when we open a package a month later, whew, it doesn't smell so good any more. But if we just use the few main ingredients, they stay stable and the food keeps tasting good. Artificial flavors can provide those most important main flavors for us in forms that are not likely to break down.

Natural flavors are more than just concentrated fruit juices too. They have to be purified, concentrated and adjusted to have the exact same strength in every batch. Many are extracted from other parts of plants that we wouldn't eat, such as the bark or leaves. Most citrus flavors are extracted from the rind or peel of the fruit, which would burn our mouths if we bit into them directly. A lot of fish and seafood flavoring can be extracted from the shells of crabs. Care to crunch on a crab shell? Not likely!

Another reason many people prefer artificial flavors is that they are allergic to the natural ones. They might not have any reaction to the main two or three ingredients in an artificial flavor. But one or more of those hundreds of minor ingredients in a natural flavor could cause them some serious pain. Food labels must show if there are any ingredients from the 8 main allergens such as peanuts, milk or soy in the food. But extracts from other plants don't have to be listed except as 'natural flavors'.

Here's a flavorful recipe that uses fresh fruit juice and dry spices for its flavors. Enjoy it now while we have local berries.

## Fruited Chicken Salad

1 ½ cups cooked diced chicken	2 cups cooked brown rice, chilled
2 Tbsp vegetable oil	1 tsp lemon juice
1 ½ Tbsp lime juice	½ tsp honey
¼ tsp dry mustard	dash of turmeric
1 kiwi fruit, peeled and sliced	1 cup sliced strawberries
1 bag spinach leaves, ready to eat	mint leaves for garnish optional

Place chicken and rice in large bowl. Combine oil, lime and lemon juices, honey, mustard and turmeric in small bowl or jar with lid. Stir or shake until well blended. Pour over chicken and toss to combine. Add kiwi and strawberries and toss gently. Chill before serving. To serve place spinach in large salad bowl or individual plates. Mound chicken and fruit mixture on top of spinach. Garnish with mint if desired. Serves 6.