

Additives in tobacco products

Liquorice Extract

Additives are substances intentionally added to tobacco products by tobacco industry in order to render toxic tobacco products palatable and acceptable to consumers.

Liquorice (or licorice) is the root of the liquorice plant from which the characteristically sweet liquorice flavour is extracted. The extract contains the very sweet substance glycyrrhizin, as well as sugars.

General uses

The root or the extract is used as a source of liquorice flavour. The liquor from the extract is often processed into a powder or a more concentrated solid block.

The liquorice root/extract is widely used in the food industry as a sweetening agent, or flavouring ingredient in drinks, candy and gum. Due to its medicinal properties it is also used in both traditional and herbal medicines e.g. in the pharmaceutical industry liquorice is used in over-the-counter drugs and cough syrups.

Reported tobacco industry uses

Tobacco manufacturers reportedly use liquorice at different stages of manufacturing to add flavour to the tobacco and to sweeten the smoke. Liquorice gives a mellow, sweet and woody note to the smoke.

The amount of liquorice added to the cigarette can make up to 4 % of the total weight of the tobacco used in one cigarette. Liquorice is also used as a flavour for other tobacco products such as cigars, and chewing tobacco.

Harmful health effects

Liquorice is generally regarded as safe for use in food and cosmetics. However, this does not suggest it is safe when inhaled from smoking cigarettes. When liquorice extracts

are burnt they produce several toxic compounds including some that are well known to cause cancer in humans (e.g. benzene), or those that could possibly cause cancer (e.g. acetaldehyde). Other toxic substances produced include the chemicals toluene and phenol that could cause other damaging health effects.

The sugars in the extract can also produce acidic compounds, which make it harder for the nicotine in the cigarette smoke to reach the brain. This forces smokers to inhale deeper and to also consume more cigarettes to get their nicotine fix. Furthermore, the use of liquorice may be indirectly harmful due to the formation of compounds called aldehydes (e.g. acetaldehyde), which can make cigarettes more addictive by enhancing the addictive potential of nicotine. Aldehydes are very reactive and produce other compounds such as the substance harman, which can also make cigarettes more addictive due to its mood-enhancing effect on the brain.

The addition of liquorice extract makes the smoking experience more pleasurable in several ways, i.e. it helps the tobacco to stay moist, balances the overall flavour of the cigarette, and reduces dryness in the mouth and throat.

Furthermore, the caramel flavours produced when the sugars in the liquorice extract are burnt help enhance the flavour and attractiveness of smoking. Also, the glycyrrhizin that is present could potentially to open up the airways, and in combination with other ingredients could allow smokers to inhale deeper, making it easier for them to get their nicotine fix.

Therefore, by adding more desirable flavours such as liquorice to cigarettes, tobacco manufacturers succeed in making smoking more pleasurable. This not only encourages the smoking habit, but also makes it easier for smokers to become addicted, which ultimately causes them to be exposed to higher levels of the toxic substances in cigarette smoke.

Additives in tobacco products

e.g. liquorice extract



can increase

- attractiveness,
- addictiveness and
- toxic emissions

therefore increase smokers' exposure to toxic smoke emissions

Increase

- health risk,
- cancer risk,
- morbidity and
- mortality

Lifetime smokers lose an average of 14 years of life

Smokers die younger

http://ec.europa.eu/health/tobacco/law/pictorial/index_en.htm

Additives in tobacco products

General information

The tobacco industry is made up of many companies that make and sell different types of tobacco products. Whether it is smoked, chewed, sniffed or inhaled second-hand, the use of these tobacco products can and does cause debilitating and life-threatening diseases, as well as premature death. The cigarette is the single most commonly used tobacco product in the European Union (EU). Most people are aware that smoking cigarettes is harmful, as thousands of compounds are produced and released in the smoke, some of which (hundreds) are toxic. But what people may not be aware of is that most tobacco manufacturers add ingredients other than tobacco to cigarettes that affect the chemical make-up of the smoke. These ingredients are known as tobacco additives and are reportedly used, for example, to:

- give a cigarette a particular flavour;
- control the way the cigarette burns;
- keep the tobacco moist thus preventing it from drying out.

To some people, the reasons for adding these substances to a consumer product may appear perfectly reasonable. They may argue that this is not necessarily a bad thing as it makes for a better consumer experience. However, helping people to better tolerate and enjoy a product like cigarettes, which is well known to be toxic and carcinogenic, is an entirely different issue and a matter of great concern.

Additives can make cigarettes more attractive by disguising some of the undesirable effects of inhaling burnt tobacco. For example, they:

- mask the bitter taste and harsh smell of the smoke that is inhaled;
- make the inhaled smoke milder, reducing the irritation of the airways (which essentially silences any warning that the smoke is dangerous);
- turn the ash and smoke white;
- improve the appearance of cigarettes.

Ultimately, by using additives, tobacco manufacturers encourage cigarette use in people who may otherwise be deterred from smoking due to the unfavourable characteristics of raw tobacco. The more pleasant the cigarette, the easier it is for a

smoker to sustain their habit, and therefore the more likely it is that they could become addicted.

Studies have also shown that burning tobacco additives can result in the formation of harmful compounds. However, it is very difficult to consider the effects of a single additive in isolation due to the overall combined effect of all the chemicals present in the tobacco smoke. Moreover, the burnt derivatives of some additives are also known to indirectly boost the effects of nicotine on the brain (nicotine being the main reason why people become addicted to smoking).

Despite this, the tobacco industry is allowed to use additives and continues to do so, on the basis that they have been considered safe for use in food or cosmetics by relevant regulatory authorities. However, this is not a sufficiently scientific basis upon which to justify their use in tobacco products. This is because people do not generally consume/use these food and cosmetic products in a state where the additives are burnt (from being exposed to very high temperatures) and then inhaled. In food and cosmetic goods, consumers are exposed to these additives in a completely different way to how they would be exposed to them through smoking tobacco products. Therefore, these additives should not be considered to have comparable effects on the body when consumed in this way. Furthermore, the fact that these additives can make tobacco products more attractive and increase their use is particularly concerning given the toxic and addictive nature of tobacco products.

Tobacco manufacturers also market 'natural' or 'clean' cigarettes that reportedly have no chemicals or additives. However, potential consumers of these cigarettes are reminded that there is no such thing as a safe cigarette, because the smoke that is produced still contains carcinogens and other toxic compounds that come from the tobacco itself.

Take home message

Tobacco manufacturers make cigarettes more attractive, which encourages their use, and makes it easier for anyone smoking to become addicted.

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Author: Dr. Urmila Nair

This fact sheet on the tobacco additive *liquorice extract* has been created by the German Cancer Research Center (DKFZ), Heidelberg, Germany. It is part of a series of 14 fact sheets on tobacco additives written in the context of the EU project Public Information Tobacco Control (PITOC). The fact sheets aim to inform the public on the general uses, tobacco industry uses and harmful health effects of selected tobacco additives.

Seven of these fact sheets have been created by the German Cancer Research Center (DKFZ), Heidelberg, Germany, and seven by the National Institute for Public Health and the Environment (RIVM), Bilthoven, the Netherlands. The introduction (or rather the general information) is a common product. The electronic versions of the fact sheets can be found on the DKFZ website <http://www.dkfz.de/de/tabakkontrolle> (carob, cellulose, guar gum, liquorice, menthol, prune juice and vanillin) and the RIVM website <http://www.tabakinfo.nl> (2-furfural, ammonium compounds, cocoa, glycerol, propylene glycol, sorbitol and sugars; additionally, a fact sheet on the tobacco smoke compound acetaldehyde is available).



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