

Sulphites in sweets

From the sweeties.net wiki

Sulphites are a family of preservatives based on sulphur dioxide. They are one of the 14 allergens that UK food law says must be declared, although only above a threshold: more than 10 mg per kg, or 10 mg per litre.

Why sulphites are used

Sulphites are used as food preservatives. Sulphur dioxide is used to preserve dried apricots, dried figs and other dried fruit, because it fights microbes and stops the fruit darkening, keeping its colour and preventing rotting. When used this way it is known as E220. Historically, molasses was treated with sulphur too, to preserve it and lighten its colour.

How they get into sweets

In sweets, sulphites can come in with another ingredient:

- **Glucose syrup.** A published ingredients list for Maynards Bassetts Wine Gums, recorded on Open Food Facts, lists glucose syrup that contains sulphites: see [are wine gums gluten free?](#)
- **Dried fruit.** Sweets containing dried fruit may contain sulphites if the fruit was preserved with them.
- **Caramel colours.** Two kinds of caramel colouring are made by reacting sugar with sulphites and have sulphite in their names, although the sulphite is tightly bound and not easily freed.

Who needs to take care

Reactions to sulphites appear to be very rare in the general population, and a reaction is seldom a true allergy. But people with asthma, and possibly people sensitive to aspirin, are at higher risk. Sulphites can cause breathing difficulty within minutes of eating, and other symptoms can include sneezing, swelling of the throat, hives and migraine. Anaphylaxis and life threatening reactions are rare.

If you think you react to sulphites, talk to your GP or an allergy specialist.

On the label

When sulphites are present above 10 mg per kg, they must be emphasised in the ingredients list of packed sweets, for example as sulphites or sulphur dioxide in bold. For loose sweets, the seller must be able to tell you which contain them: see [pick and mix and allergies](#)

Every sweet in our pick and mix has a card that opens up to show its ingredients and allergens, including sulphites where they are declared.

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