Today’s piece was prepared by Michael Avesar, MD and is based on NPR’s All Things Considered, entitled “Moms petition Mars to remove artificial dyes from M&M’s”.

http://www.npr.org/blogs/thesalt/2013/10/18/236221076/moms-petition-mars-to-remove-artificial-dyes-from-m-ms

The article describes a petition that urges the Mars company to change the petroleum-based artificial dyes in M&M’s to vegetable-based dyes due to a possible relationship between the artificial colors and behavioral changes. The article notes that European regulators have already banned the artificial colors and describes a lack of scientific consensus about whether dyes are a major contributor to behavioral problems.

Upon reviewing the primary literature, it would be more accurate to describe the level of scientific evidence as strong, but for a small effect. A double blinded, effectively randomized trial of a rather large and generalizable population of children proved a modest but statistically significant link between artificial coloring and short-term increases in hyperactivity (1). Faults in the study include confounding preservative compounds in the artificial coloring and lack of a reference/discussion on possible mechanisms. Assuming this relationship is indeed causal, the conclusions about the effects of these color compounds should be reframed for two key reasons: (1) children are eating these colors on a daily basis, so the short-term effect is actually more of a persistent problem; and (2) ADHD is a complex multifactorial behavior, so linking a small portion of hyperactivity to food coloring creates the opportunity to add a simple public health based strategy to the current multi-level treatment and prevention approach.

**RESOURCE ON A.D.H.D.:**

Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder Advocacy, resources and information [www.chadd.org](http://www.chadd.org).

McCann D, Food additives and hyperactive behavior in 3-year-old and 8/9-year-old children in the community: A randomized, double-blinded placebo-controlled trial. Lancet, 2007.

And that’s today’s Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics: IN THE NEWS!