

Not so Good & Plenty

By ACSH Staff — October 31, 2011

Most parents who are concerned about the contents of their child's trick-or-treat loot focus on insubstantial but highly publicized scares about things like artificial colorings and high fructose corn syrup. However, for adults with a penchant for black licorice, the FDA has issued a [Halloween warning](#) ^[1] about a natural ingredient that can be an actual cause for concern.

Glycyrrhizin is the chemical derived from the licorice root that gives the chewy candy its sweet flavor. However, when consumed in large enough quantities, this natural sweetener can also lead to heart arrhythmia. Because glycyrrhizin raises blood pressure and causes the kidneys to excrete potassium, someone who eats a lot of black licorice could actually lower their levels of potassium to such a point that the heart may beat at a dangerous pace. Too much black licorice, then, could be a problem for adults who already suffer from heart problems, high blood pressure, or kidney problems.

How much is too much black licorice? The FDA advises that eating two ounces or more of the stuff every day for about two weeks may cause problems for people whose heart or kidney functions are already at risk. Furthermore, the combination of a steady diet of glycyrrhizin with medications such as diuretics, digoxin, and laxatives can also result in potassium levels low enough to cause or worsen heart arrhythmia.

While ACSH's Dr. Ruth Kava notes that the hazards of indulging in black licorice certainly aren't a widespread problem, she points out that it's still a bona fide concern that people with heart and kidney problems should be aware of much more real, she says, than fears about the color of your M&Ms or the high fructose corn syrup content of your Junior Mints.

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[1] <http://www.fda.gov/ForConsumers/ConsumerUpdates/ucm277152.htm>