

Caramel Colouring in Beverages – Fact Sheet

Caramel colour is made commercially by the controlled heating of sugar or glucose and is used in small amounts in a range of foods and beverages, primarily to colour the end product. In fact, it is one of the most widely used colours. Depending upon the ingredients used in its production, the resulting dark brown liquid is used in a variety of products including soft drinks, beer, bakery products, soups, gravies, syrups and puddings.

Caramel colour is very versatile. It can be custom-made to produce exactly the right shade for a specific food or beverage. There are four different types (classes) of caramel colour which are used in food depending upon the product. As a result, the science of manufacturing caramel colour and the art of its use in foods have evolved systematically over the years.

Class III and Class IV caramel colouring are the ones used for cola type beverages (and other foods). During the manufacture of these types of caramel colouring, as with the normal cooking process for roasting meats or coffee beans, trace amounts of 4-methylimidazole (4-MEI) are formed.



Caramel colour is approved for use as a food colour in soft drinks by Food Standards Australia and New Zealand (FSANZ). As with all approved ingredients, FSANZ ensures a rigorous assessment process to determine safe use under normal circumstances.

FSANZ, the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) have all evaluated consumer exposure to 4-MEI from the use of caramel colours and reaffirmed that there is no reason for any safety concerns based on existing available evidence.

All ingredients used in products manufactured by Australian Beverages Council's members have met the stringent requirements for approval as additives by FSANZ. In addition to helping maintain product quality, these ingredients are used to provide flavour and colour, which contribute to the appeal and enjoyment of soft drinks.

