A friend of mine who brews beer told me something quite startling recently. He said he read in a brewer's magazine that Budweiser uses chicken hearts in their beer. Is this true? Why do they use them? Does anybody else? I assure you this is not a case of professional jealousy--we can't stand Bud anyway.

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Why are alcoholic beverages exempt from having to list their ingredients? How can the consumer tell if a beer has preservatives, chemical additives, or artificial flavors and colors? Mass consumption of alcohol is unhealthy enough without also having to ingest assorted chemical horrors.

— Sparky H., Chicago, Steve N., Phoenix

Dear Boys:

There is no question that a disquieting amount of chemical crud goes into the nation's beer (not to mention its wine and liquor), but Uncle Cecil must humbly confess that he does not know exactly what goes into which. That's because the booze industry has successfully resisted all attempts to force it to list ingredients, on the ridiculous grounds that doing so would be too expensive.

The real reason, needless to say, is that if you, Joe Consumer, knew what kind of sludge went into your favorite brand, you would probably drink a lot less of it. I don't know about chicken hearts, but some brewers use seaweed extract as a foam stabilizer, and some wine makers use fish glue to prevent cloudiness.

Queasy as these things sound, they're probably harmless, which is more than you can
say for some additives. In the mid-60s, for instance, about 50 people died when brewers began putting cobalt sulfate into their products as a foaming agent. Beverage manufacturers don't intentionally murder their customers, of course. But the fact is that a fair number of people are allergic or otherwise sensitive to booze additives, and in the absence of labeling the only way to find out if there's anything bad in a given brew is to take a hefty swig of it and see if you keel over.

Anheuser-Busch claims that Budweiser contains only natural ingredients: water, barley malt, rice, hops, yeast, and tannin, an ant McCludiness agent that is mostly removed from the final product. They say there's no chicken hearts or anything else. On the other hand, Miller, Anheuser's chief competitor, uses quite a bit of chemical goo.

We can prove this by performing the following easy 'n' fun test for the presence of foam stabilizers. Get two clean beer glasses, and into each put one drop of milk diluted 70-to-1 with water. Then pour Bud into one glass and Miller into the other. Unless the manufacturers have changed their formulas in the last couple weeks, the head on the Bud will die like a dog within two minutes (which it should--even a tiny trace of milk is deadly to beer foam), whereas the one on the Miller won't, indicating the presence of false drugs.

The preceding exercise in handy home chemistry is supplied by the Center for Science in the Public Interest, a consumer group based in Washington, D.C., that recently made a not-very-successful effort to get manufacturers to voluntarily reveal their ingredients. I don't mean to single out the Miller company, but you may be interested to know that Miller Lite contains propylene glycol alginate, water, barley malt, corn syrup, chemically modified hop extracts, yeast, amylglucosidase, carbon dioxide, papain enzyme, liquid sugar, potassium metabisulfite, and Emka-malt, whatever that is. I would venture to say that light beers as a class tend to have more additives than others, simply because they'd be totally flat and tasteless otherwise.

For more info on this subject, see Chemical Additives in Booze, available from the Center for Science in the Public Interest, 1755 S Street NW, Washington, D.C. 20009.

— Cecil Adams

http://www.straightdope.com/columns/read/323/does-budweiser-beer-contain-chicken-hearts