

Comparing Artificial Sweeteners

Topic Overview

What are artificial sweeteners?

Artificial sweeteners can be used instead of sugar to sweeten foods and drinks. You can add them to drinks like coffee or iced tea, and they are found in many foods sold in grocery stores. These sweeteners, also called sugar substitutes, are made from chemicals and natural substances.

Sugar substitutes have very few calories compared to sugar. Some have no calories. Many people use sugar substitutes as a way to limit how much sugar they eat, whether it's to lose weight, control blood sugar, or avoid getting cavities in their teeth.

The most common sugar substitutes are:

Aspartame (Equal, NutraSweet). It's mostly used to sweeten diet soft drinks.

Saccharin (Sweet'N Low, Sugar Twin). It's used in many diet foods and drinks.

Sucralose (Splenda). It's in many diet foods and drinks.

Acesulfame K (Sunett). It's often combined with saccharin in diet soft drinks.

Stevia (Truvia, PureVia, SweetLeaf). Stevia is made from a herbal plant and is used in foods and drinks.

Sugar alcohols are also used to sweeten diet foods and drinks. These plant-based products include mannitol, sorbitol, and xylitol. If you eat too much of them, sugar alcohols can cause diarrhea, bloating, and weight gain.

If your goal is to lose weight, keep in mind that even though a food is sugar-free, it can still have **carbohydrate**, **fats**, and **calories**. It's a good idea to read the nutrition label to check for calories and carbohydrate.

Are sugar substitutes safe?

Yes. The FDA regulates the use of artificial sweeteners. At one time, saccharin was thought to increase the risk of bladder cancer in animals. Studies reviewed by the FDA have found no clear evidence of a link between saccharin and cancer in humans.

People who have **phenylketonuria** (PKU) should avoid foods and drinks that have aspartame, which contains **phenylalanine**.¹

Do artificial sweeteners raise blood sugar?

No. Artificial sweeteners provide no energy, so they won't affect your blood sugar. If you have diabetes, these substitutes are safe to use. But that's not true of sugar alcohols. They don't cause sudden spikes in blood sugar, but the carbohydrate in them can affect your blood sugar.

If you have diabetes, read food labels carefully to find out the amount of carbohydrate in each serving of food containing sugar alcohol. It's also a good idea to test your blood sugar after you eat foods with sugar alcohols or artificial sweeteners to find out how they affect your blood sugar.

How do sugar substitutes compare?

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Sweetener name	Can be used for cooking and baking
Aspartame (NutraSweet, Equal)	No, because it breaks down during cooking
Saccharin (Sweet'N Low)	Yes
Sucralose (Splenda)	Yes
Acesulfame K (Sunett)	Yes
Stevia (Truvia, PureVia, SweetLeaf)	Yes

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