

Sweet Taste, Without The Calories

Trying to cut back on calories or carbohydrates (carbs) but like foods that taste sweet? Try non-nutritive sweeteners! They are commonly called sugar substitutes, no-calorie sweeteners, sugar replacements, artificial sweeteners or are referred to by their package color: pink, blue or yellow. Non-nutritive sweeteners, when used in place of sugar, decrease the total carbs (and therefore, calories) of favorite foods and drinks. The decrease can help with weight and blood glucose control.

Approved Sweeteners

Five non-nutritive sweeteners have been approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for use in foods and/or drinks:

- Acesulfame-potassium (also known as acesulfame K or Ace-K)
- Aspartame
- Neotame
- Saccharin
- Sucralose

Each provides more than 100 times the sweetening power of sugar, so only a very small amount of the non-nutritive sweetener is needed.

The non-nutritive sweeteners are calorie-free, except for aspartame, which is very low in calories.

- Drinks, such as fruit-flavored powder mixes made with aspartame, have fewer than five calories per eight-ounce serving.
- Carbonated soda made with sucralose has one calorie or less per 12-ounce serving.
- Adding a packet of any sugar replacement to your coffee or tea does not add any calories nor cause a rise in your blood glucose. In comparison, every teaspoon of sugar adds 16 calories (from four grams of carbs).

Do not use non-nutritive sweeteners or sugar-free foods to treat low blood glucose levels.

- A typical 20-ounce carbonated beverage may have 16 teaspoons of sugar. Drinking a diet soda instead of a regular soda can save about 256 calories and 64 grams of carbs!

Sugar-free Does Not Mean to Use Freely

“Sugar-free” means that no white sugar, brown sugar or any other sugar-based sweetener, such as honey, high-fructose corn syrup or dextrose has been added to a food or drink. A food may have the words “sugar-free” on the front label, but that does not mean the food is carbohydrate-free or calorie-free. Read the Nutrition Facts label to decide how to include a sugar-free food or drink **within** your meal plan, **not in addition to it**. For example, sugar-free gum is calorie-free — and therefore, carb-free — and may be used as an unlimited or “free” food. Sugar-free cookies will contribute calories (and carbs) and need to be worked into your meal plan and carb budget.

Don't Confuse Sugar Alcohols with Non-nutritive Sweeteners

Many sugar-free foods contain sugar alcohols, such as erythritol, hydrogenated starch hydrolysates, isomalt, lactitol, maltitol, mannitol, sorbitol, and xylitol. These sweeteners are carbohydrates. Just like with sugar-free foods, read the Nutrition Facts label of foods containing sugar alcohols to see how they can best fit into your meal plan or carb budget. **A note of caution:** large amounts of sugar alcohols may cause bloating, gas or diarrhea.

Non-nutritive sweeteners can be helpful in weight loss by reducing calories in foods they are used in. Non-nutritive sweeteners have not been shown to increase hunger, weight gain or cravings for sweets. Non-nutritive sweeteners help people who are trying to lose weight by reducing calories in foods they are used in. Using these sweeteners can help you feel more satisfied with your meal plan by keeping you from feeling deprived of foods that taste sweet.

Sweetener Safety

Each of the five FDA-approved non-nutritive sweeteners has been extensively tested. The FDA states that they are safe to eat in the amounts that consumers typically eat them. This safety level is called the acceptable daily intake (ADI). This is the amount of a food additive that can be safely eaten on a daily basis over a person's lifetime without harm. The FDA includes a 100-fold safety factor when setting the ADI. This means that the allowed amount per day is 1/100 of the amount that is considered safe. Current studies have shown that the ADI amount for these non-nutritive sweeteners is not being exceeded.

What about reports of brain cancer, tumors or other problems from non-nutritive sweeteners? These complaints have not been proven in several years of research.

The American Dietetic Association, through its Evidence Analysis Library, continues to monitor new research on the effects of the non-nutritive sweeteners. Long-term studies will continue to help confirm the safety of non-nutritive sweeteners in our food supply.

If you feel you do not tolerate a particular non-nutritive sweetener, try switching to another type or not using them. You have a choice as to whether or not you include non-nutritive sweeteners or sugars in your foods. The use of non-nutritive sweeteners can help reduce carbs and calories. Sugars can be included in a healthful style of eating within your

carbohydrate budget. If you have questions about the use of sugars and non-nutritive sweeteners, discuss them with a registered dietitian or diabetes educator.

Where Can I Look for More Information on Non-nutritive Sweeteners?

Look for more information at the

International Food Information Council Foundation (www.ific.org), the American Dietetic Association (www.eatright.org) and the American Diabetes Association (www.diabetes.org) web sites.

Are Non-nutritive Sweeteners Safe?

It is the position of the American Dietetic Association that consumers can safely enjoy a range of nutritive and non-nutritive sweeteners when consumed in a diet that is guided by current federal nutrition recommendations, such as the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and the Dietary References Intakes, as well as individual health goals.

– American Dietetic Association position statement on sweeteners *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, February 2004:104; 255-275



www.dce.org

©2007 Diabetes Care and Education Dietetic Practice Group. Permission to reproduce for nonprofit educational purposes granted through 2010.

For more information: Contact the American Dietetic Association at www.eatright.org or 1-800-366-1655.

Authored by: Andrea Dunn, RD, LD, CDE; Nell Stuart, MS, RD, LD, CDE

Sponsored by: International Food Information Council Foundation. For more information, visit www.ific.org.