

Sugar Substitutes

Sugar substitutes include both artificial sweeteners (like aspartame) and sweeteners from natural sources (stevia). Food additives are thoroughly assessed through governmental bodies to ensure safety for consumption. Here at the Wharton Medical clinic, we try to encourage water (and some low fat milk) as your main source of hydration but artificially sweetened beverages can be a way to wean yourself off of high calorie drinks. Using sugar substitutes instead of sugar is helpful to reduce carbohydrate intake. Try to use these in the amounts you would for regular sugar, and not treating them as a “free” food that has no limit; as you would be influencing your preference for how sweet you prefer your food to taste.

Stevia – 300x sweeter than table sugar



- A fairly new sugar substitute being used today. Stevia is classified as a food ingredient rather than an additive and therefore does not need to be reviewed for use in food by the government.
- *“Health Canada has not been able to provide a definitive opinion on the safety of retail foods containing stevia leaf because the available scientific data on its safety is considered incomplete” – Health Canada*
- Limit to 280mg/day for the leaf powder and 1mg/kg of body weight per day for stevioside.

Aspartame (Equal, NutraSweet, Sugar Twin, SweetNLow) – 160-250x sweeter than table sugar



- Has been permitted for use in Canada since 1981.
- It is a man-made artificial sweetener.
- *“There is no evidence to suggest that the consumption of foods containing this sweetener, according to the provisions of the Food and Drug Regulations and as part of a well-balanced diet, would pose a health hazard to consumers” – Health Canada*
- There are some issues of tolerance in some people (sensitivities, allergies)
- Limit to 40mg per Kg of body weight per day. Unsafe for people with PKU.

Sucralose (Splenda) – 600x sweeter than table sugar

- Safe for use in baking
- Limit to 9mg/kg of body weight per day
- *“In 1991, Canada’s Health Protection Branch became the first regulatory agency to both endorse the safety of sucralose and to allow its use in beverages and other food products ranging from baked goods to ice cream to coffee and tea.” - Food Safety Network*

If an individual is not able to give up their sweet tooth cold turkey and they do not experience side effects from the sweetener, including food seeking behaviors, then it may be used wisely as part of their weight loss plan. Remember to be mindful of what you are eating/drinking along with your sweetened foods.

By Lisa Talarowski – Bariatric Educator

Sources: <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/secureit/addit/sweeten-edulcor/index-eng.php>, <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/secureit/addit/sweeten-edulcor/aspartame-eng.php>, <https://www.uoguelph.ca/foodsafetynetwork/sweeteners>