

Leyla Weighs In: The Dangers of Artificial Sweeteners



Breaking the sugar habit can be tough, but replacing sugar with artificial sweeteners carries its own challenges and risks.

By making the change to artificial sweeteners, we're not really breaking the sugar habit. Instead, we're using a substitute that tastes like sugar. So, we're still craving the sweet stuff, and now on top of that, it's artificial. No victory there.

Scientific studies have shown that aspartame (NutraSweet, Equal) adversely impacts blood sugar and insulin levels in the same way sugar does. Yes, it's zero calories, but weight gain is not *just* about calories. These artificial substances keep metabolism in fat storage mode just the same by spiking the hormone insulin. Aspartame is especially notorious for fat gain, and to add insult to injury, it's also a neurotoxin—toxic to the brain. Recently, there was also some association found between aspartame use and **incidence of certain cancers**. Let me be clear: An association does not mean causation. However, this finding merits further investigation.

I have many weight loss patients who eventually hit a plateau. Upon further assessment of eating habits, I often find regular consumption of diet soda or other artificially sweetened beverages (i.e., diet iced teas, Crystal Light). Eliminate the artificially-sweetened beverage and *viola*—plateau is gone and weight loss resumes! I have countless anecdotes of this.

Although sucralose (Splenda) was the star and savior for sugar lovers everywhere during my time at the Atkins Center, recent research reveals it isn't much better. It, too, can cause surges in blood sugar and insulin in many individuals, keeping them in perpetual fat storage mode. There are also **adverse impacts on the microbiome** to consider when using sucralose as well as other sweeteners.

So what about stevia? Yes it's natural, but so are sugar, marijuana, and heroin. Should we take those too? It's likely the most innocuous sweetener, but stevia can keep you in sweet-craving mode. This is just more misery that comes with enabling an addiction (to sugar). I am also not convinced that stevia is without blame in weight loss plateaus and unstable blood sugar, in those who are susceptible.

Sugar alcohols like erythritol and xylitol, among others, aren't recognized as carbohydrates in the body. They simply pass through you, *literally*, if you take enough of them. Most people can't tolerate more than 20 grams of sugar alcohols—the amount in, say, two low-carb protein bars—without having a laxative effect.

Enter allulose, the new darling on the scene. Found naturally in dried fruits, maple syrup and brown sugar, so far it's showing some benefits with **only little impact on**

blood sugar. However, it's not yet used in Europe and Canada since it is novel and not enough testing has been done to determine any adverse effects. But beware, regular use can also cause GI upsets like bloating and gassiness.

And by the way, agave nectar is the new high fructose corn syrup, in case you didn't know.

So if you really can't drink your tea or coffee without using some kind of sweetener, consider this: It's not the beverage itself that you enjoy; it's simply a sugar delivery system for you.

To your health!

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