



Artificial Sweeteners

Artificial sweeteners are sweeteners that are not found in nature. These sweeteners contain few or no calories. They are often used in place of sugar or other caloric sweeteners in processed foods marketed as diet-friendly or “sugar-free.”

In the United States, several artificial sweeteners have been approved for use in food. The table below lists these sweeteners, their common associated brands, and common products in which they are found.

Artificial Sweetener	Associated Brand Names	Found In
Acesulfame-K (acesulfame potassium)	Sunette® Sweet One® Swiss Sweet®	Combined in products with other artificial sweeteners for a more sugar-like taste
Advantame		Baked goods, processed foods
Aspartame	Equal® Nutra Taste® NutraSweet®	Instant tea and coffee, powdered drink mixes, pudding, soft drinks, yogurt, chewing gum
Neotame	Newtame®	Baked goods, processed foods
Saccharin	Sweet’N Low® Sugar Twin® Necta Sweet®	Baked goods, candy, canned fruit, jams, salad dressings, soft drinks, chewing gum, lip gloss, mouthwash, pharmaceuticals, toothpaste, vitamins
Sucralose	Splenda®	Baked goods, frozen dairy desserts, fruit juices, gelatins, soft drinks, chewing gum
Stevia	PureVia® Rebiana® Splenda Naturals® Truvia®	Baked goods, processed foods, soft drinks
Tagatose	Nutrilatose®	Milk, ice cream, other dairy products

Food manufacturers began developing artificial sweeteners and marketing them as healthy alternatives to refined sugar as early as 1880. These types of sweeteners became increasingly popular in the 1960s, and are still widely used today. The FDA endorses the safety of artificial sweeteners, but there is a lack of high quality, evidence-based research on humans to encourage their use.

Are Artificial Sweeteners Safe?

One of the main concerns about artificial sweeteners is their potential to cause harm in the body. Some have been linked to attention-deficit disorders, birth defects, diabetes, digestive upset, headaches, inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), seizures, and some forms of cancer. For this reason, consumption of artificial sweeteners is not recommended for children or pregnant women.

Another concern about artificial sweeteners is how they affect the body and brain's ability to gauge how much has been eaten. Providing sweetness without calories confuses the body's normal digestive processes. This can lead to intense food cravings, overeating, storage of extra calories as fat, and metabolic diseases and disorders.

For best health, it is recommended that only minimal amounts of sugars, natural sweeteners, and artificial sweeteners be consumed regularly. A balanced diet rich in whole foods and minimal inclusion of processed foods and additives is preferred.

A Note about Stevia

Stevia is marketed as a natural, no-calorie alternative sweetener. It is made from the plant *Stevia rebaudiana*, but packaged stevia and other sweeteners made with stevia aren't always 100% natural. To make it shelf stable, some brands include additives and fillers that can cause adverse reactions to food. To be sure you are choosing the most pure, natural form of stevia, choose brands with only one ingredient: organic stevia leaves.

References

- Artificial Sweeteners. The Nutrition Source. <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/healthy-drinks/artificial-sweeteners/>. Accessed December 4, 2016.
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- Shankar P, Ahuja S, Sriram K. Non-nutritive sweeteners: Review and update. *Nutrition*. 2013;29(11):1293-9. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.nut.2013.03.024>.

