

## Are You Sweet on Artificial Sweeteners?

Losing unwanted pounds of body fat can be challenging, even when the person attempting to improve their health and looks is doing everything correctly. So, does substituting artificial sweeteners for real sugar products improve your chances of success? Artificial sweeteners might seem to be a smart choice to sweeten foods without adding calories, but the reality might surprise you. It may be easier to lose weight if you forego the 'fake sweeteners'. Artificial sweeteners are products like Equal (aspartame), Sweet n Low (saccharine) and Splenda (sucralose). It is true that they contain few or no calories. And by themselves, will not illicit an insulin response, as sugar does. But don't let this fool you. These products will mess with your body in other ways that may make it difficult to drop those extra pounds.

To begin, let's look at the liver. This is the largest organ in the body and everything you ingest eventually is metabolized by it. The liver decides what foods need to be absorbed and what needs to be filtered out. Artificial sweeteners are not naturally occurring. Your liver isn't quite sure what to do with them, so anything that is not natural will be treated as a toxin. This goes for any substance that is not a natural food source. If your diet contains an over abundance of artificial sweeteners, your liver becomes less effective at processing nutrients and fats. If you become less efficient at processing the needed nutrients and fats, this may create a series of events which may prevent you from losing weight, or worse, cause you to gain weight.

Saccharin is 300 times sweeter than sugar. Aspartame is 200 times sweeter than sugar. Sucralose is 600 times sweeter than sugar. Constant use of these sweeteners will increase our sweet tooth. Simply put, our desire for sweet foods increases. Natural flavors taste bland in comparison to the sweetness that these products provide. Experts have determined that sweet foods provide a stimulus which initiates digestive reflexes. The false sweetness from an artificially sweetened food is not followed by an influx of calories. This causes confusion in the body's digestive sequence. It may cause you to overeat as you just don't feel satisfied or satiated. Your healthy eating efforts may be sabotaged if you feel hunger pangs all day long. These hunger signals tell you to eat more, until you finally eat enough to shut the signal off. Even when high quality foods are consumed, the quantity undermines any weight loss efforts. This explains, in part, why obesity rates are climbing at the same alarming rate as artificial sweetener use.

Another phenomenon occurs when artificial sweeteners are consumed. Under normal circumstances, body temperature elevates after a meal. One study showed that when these sweeteners are ingested, there was no subsequent rise in body temperature, suggesting that appetite control mechanisms were again disrupted. This again leads to over eating.

Some artificial sweetener advocates argue that the clinical studies on these substances are done using lab rats, so the results don't translate to humans. If you are concerned with your health in the least, it seems reckless to assume that these substances are completely safe. In fact, there is much compelling evidence to suggest that the use of artificial sweeteners should at least be moderated.

Thankfully, there is an alternative to artificial sweeteners, called stevia. Stevia is a naturally occurring product that is harvested from a plant. It can be found at most health food stores. It is calorie free and therefore will not illicit an insulin response as sugar does. It is used by hundreds of millions of people worldwide to balance blood sugar levels, reduce sweet cravings and aid in digestion. It is even known for its antimicrobial properties. It seems odd that this wonder herb has not received much attention as an alternative to sugar. But then again, it may be that health food advocates may not have the marketing dollars that the companies producing artificial sweeteners do. The sweetener business is a multi-million dollar a year industry, not terribly concerned with your health, or body fat levels.

As with most things in life, moderation is the key. Too much of anything can be potentially damaging. It would be wise to become more aware of the use of artificial sweeteners in your diet. Many products contain these substances and you may not be aware that you are consuming them at all. Some sound advice is to read labels and understand them. Cutting down or eliminating the use of artificial sweeteners may turn out to be a sweet surprise in your weight loss strategy.

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