

## SPLENDA, IS IT REALLY SPLENDID?

*By Rosemary Nardone*

We all know that excessive sugar causes health problems such as diabetes, cardiovascular and inflammatory diseases – not to mention obesity and rotten teeth.

But if we give up sugar and think we've found the perfect alternative in aspartame (NutraSweet, Equal) and sucralose (Splenda), we should think again.

Artificial sweeteners are comprised of more than 20 different chemicals, many with names you can't even pronounce. Only five of these have been approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

Some studies link artificial sweeteners to cancer. More and more links are coming forth regarding other dangerous side effects, such as kidney problems and cataracts.

As a Nutritional Health Counselor, I have had several clients complain about vertigo and headaches. (One woman wound up in the hospital with cholesterol-related HDL/LDL issues, which turned out to be connected to artificial sweeteners.) When I did a complete health history on each of them, I noticed a common denominator. Each of them used Sweet'n Low or NutraSweet in coffee, iced tea and foods. When I recommended they stop taking them, their symptoms disappeared in three days to a week. Also noted was an immediate lift, both mentally and emotionally.

Most people are unaware of the fact that artificial sweeteners suppress production of serotonin, a neurotransmitter that controls eating patterns. Without adequate serotonin, the body experiences intense sugar and carbohydrate cravings, which – guess what? – lead to binging and weight gain. I work with many obese clients and all of them drank a lot of diet soda. Thinking they were cutting calories, they became addicted to their Diet Cokes, Sprites and iced teas. But it backfired. Their brains were telling them to consume more and more calories!

According to the National Cancer Institute, there is no clear evidence that artificial sweeteners are related to cancer risk in humans. However, numerous studies performed on laboratory rats link aspartame and saccharin to cancer, including a recent seven-year study by a major nonprofit organization in Italy.

A particularly astonishing experiment with aspartame was conducted by a woman named Victoria Inness-Brown whose family was addicted to diet soda. After researching the effects of aspartame, which she believed would lead to illness and possibly death, she decided to perform her own experiment with 108 rats. Each day for two years and eight months, she fed the rats the equivalent of their body weight (two-thirds of the aspartame in an 8-ounce can of diet soda) Of 11 females, , 37% developed fatal tumors, some of massive size. Control groups fed no aspartame showed no visible effects.

Other ailments relating to these artificial sweeteners are birth defects epilepsy, seizures, emotional disorders and, believe it or not, diabetes. This is not widely publicized, but the American Diabetes Association (ADA) is actually recommending artificial sweeteners to people with diabetes. According to research conducted by diabetes specialists, aspartame can precipitate the onset of clinical

diabetes, causes poor diabetic control in diabetics on insulin or oral drugs, and aggravates diabetic complications like retinopathy.

Know that if you consume a lot of diet foods and beverages with artificial sweeteners, your body will crave sweets because you are not giving it the fuel it needs. Our bodies, particularly our brains, need small amounts of sugar – even mother's milk contains sugar.

So what's a weight-conscious person to do?

There are a slew of healthful substitutes that are good for the body, including Stevia and Zsweet (erithritol, a sugar alcohol refined without harmful chemicals). Also look for low-glycemic sugars such as agave syrup, pure maple syrup and honey in small amounts.

And don't forget fruits and vegetables. Most foods (except for proteins and fats) contain some kind of sugar. Foods with a high-glycemic index, e.g. bread, pasta, rice, cereal and baked goods, raise blood sugar quickly and increase body fat. We don't think of these "white foods" as sugary foods, but technically they are! Stick with safe or low-glycemic sugar substitutes and try to follow a low-glycemic diet. You'll rebalance your body, kick the artificial sweetener habit and protect your most treasured possession – your health.

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