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Diabetes Health Center

Artificial Sweeteners and Diabetes

Is it possible for someone with [diabetes](#) to eat sweets? The answer is "yes." Artificial sweeteners for diabetes patients is one strategy you can use. But which artificial sweeteners are OK? How should you use them?

What Is an Artificial Sweetener?

You may hear many names for sweeteners: sugars, reduced-calorie sweeteners, low-calorie sweeteners. Only some of these sweeteners are "artificial." Use this list to compare sweeteners:

Sugars are naturally occurring carbohydrates. They contain calories and raise your [blood glucose](#) levels -- the level of sugar in your blood. Examples are brown sugar, cane sugar, confectioner's sugar, fructose, honey, and molasses.

Reduced-calorie sweeteners are sugar alcohols. These sweeteners have about half the calories of sugars and are considered a separate type of carbohydrates. They can raise your blood sugar levels, although not as much as other carbohydrates. Examples include isomalt, maltitol, mannitol, sorbitol, and xylitol. You'll often find these reduced-calorie sweeteners in sugar-free candy and gum.

Low-calorie sweeteners are "artificial." This means they were created in a lab rather than found naturally. Low-calorie sweeteners are considered "free foods." They have no calories and do not raise your blood sugar levels.

Types of Artificial Sweeteners for Diabetes Patients

What are the best artificial sweeteners for diabetics? The FDA has approved these low-calorie sweeteners for diabetic [nutrition](#). It considers them to be safe for use by the general public. The American Diabetes Association also recommends their use.

Saccharin can be found as Sweet 'N Low and Sugar Twin. You can use it in both hot and cold foods. Avoid this sweetener if you are pregnant or [breastfeeding](#).

Aspartame is found as NutraSweet and Equal. You can use it in both cold and warm foods. It may lose some sweetness at high temperatures. People who have a condition called phenylketonuria should avoid this sweetener.

Acesulfame potassium or acesulfame-K is found as Sweet One, Swiss Sweet, and Sunett. You can use it in both cold and hot foods, including in baking and cooking.

Sucralose is found as Splenda. You can use it in hot and cold foods, including in baking and cooking. Processed foods often contain it.

Finding Artificial Sweeteners for Diabetes Patients in Prepared Foods

No sugar, low-sugar, naturally sweetened, no added sugar -- the list of what you encounter on products while shopping can be overwhelming. Use this "cheat sheet" to identify which products are sweetened the way you want them.

No sugar means the product does not contain sugar at all. It may contain sugar alcohols or artificial sweeteners.

No added sugar means that during processing, no extra sugar was added. However, the original source might have contained sugar such as fructose in fruit juice. Additional sweeteners such as sugar alcohols or artificial sweeteners might have been added.

Sugar free means that the product contains no sugars. It may contain sugar alcohols or artificial sweeteners, however.

Dietetic can mean a lot of things. It's likely that the product has reduced calories.

All natural simply means that the product does not contain artificial ingredients. It may contain natural sweeteners, such as sugars or sugar alcohol.

When in Doubt, Read the Nutrition Label

To know for sure what kind of sweetener a food product contains, check the Nutrition Facts label. Under the Carbohydrate section, you can see how many carbohydrates the product contains. You can also see how much of these carbohydrates are in the form of sugar or sugar alcohol.

For even more information on diabetic nutrition, read the Ingredients list. It should indicate any added sweeteners, whether they are sugars, sugar alcohols, or artificial.

Remember Your Goal for Using Artificial Sweeteners for Diabetes Patients

By understanding more about artificial sweeteners and diabetes, you will be able to make better food choices. Artificial sweeteners give you another strategy to help you balance pleasure from eating with good blood sugar control.