

Translation of Research to Help Answer Patient Questions About Sweeteners

Table 2. Translation of Research to Help Answer Patient Questions About Sweeteners.

Frequently Asked Patient Questions	Translation of Research to Assist Responses
I want to eat healthier, but I don't know how. What will help me make better eating choices?	The new Nutrition Facts Label will help us make healthier choices by identifying foods with natural sugar from foods with added sugar. Reducing sugar added during manufacture or processing is recommended by all health organizations.
How will I recognize an artificial sugar?	Low calorie sweeteners can be labeled <i>noncaloric, nonnutritive, artificial, or diet</i> .
Are natural sugars healthier than artificial sweeteners?	Natural unrefined sugars in whole foods including milk, yogurt, and fruit are a source of essential nutrients. But there are many different types of natural sugars that are isolated or concentrated and added to foods and beverages by the manufacturer, such as fruit juice concentrates. The 2015 Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGA) associated negative health outcomes when added sugar is overconsumed. The new Nutrition Facts Label will make it easier to identify added sugar and make informed dietary decisions.
Do low calorie sweeteners increase hunger and cause weight gain?	The evidence shows low calorie sweeteners may actually help weight loss if other calories eaten don't make up for calories saved. Meta-analysis of over 68 trials and studies shows no consistent association between low calorie sweeteners, appetite increase, or weight gain. It is suggested that low calorie sweetened food and beverages may help reduce hunger and facilitate weight loss, reducing BMI, fat mass, and waist circumference if substituted for higher calorie choices.
How much sugar is safe to include in my diet?	The evidence suggests including less than 10% of calories from added sugars is a healthier way to eat and by reducing added sugars, some health risks will be reduced. The risk of developing type 2 diabetes, hypertension, and heart disease is increased in adults by a higher intake of added sugars, especially in sugar sweetened beverages.
Do artificial sweeteners cause disease?	The evidence does not prove that low calorie sweeteners cause diabetes, weight gain, or changes in appetite. Substituting low calorie sweetened beverages, often called diet, will help reduce your intake of added sugars. The 2015 DGA suggests that reducing added sugars is a goal for all Americans.
Are artificial sweeteners safe to use?	Evidence shows that the amount of low calorie sweetener used can make a difference even if within safe levels. Too much may result in diarrhea, bloating, or gas due to the laxative effect of other ingredients combined with NNS. Adverse events should be reported to someone in health care.
Is one artificial sweetener safer to use than another?	Promoting one NNS as "real" or "natural" does not necessarily indicate that the product is safer. Evidence shows it is the amount of low calorie sweetener not the type that determines safety. Ask how many packs of sugar substitute are used daily, how many diet beverages are consumed, and what else is included in the person's usual food and beverage choices.
Is saccharine safe to use?	The evidence has shown that saccharine does not cause cancer in humans and is safe to use.

(Continued on next page)

(Continued from previous page)

Translation of Research to Help Answer Patient Questions About Sweeteners

Is aspartame safe to use?	The evidence shows that aspartame is safe to use. This conclusion has been reaffirmed recently by leading health and food safety regulatory authorities around the world, including the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) and FDA. Aspartame is completely digested in the upper small intestine, absorbed into the blood, and not likely to affect the microbiome. There has been no human association with cancer. But, aspartame is not safe for people with a rare hereditary condition called phenylketonuria (PKU). People with PKU cannot metabolize phenylalanine, an amino acid that is found in aspartame, meat, beans, and many other foods. All foods containing phenylalanine as well as aspartame must be avoided. A warning is on all food labels with aspartame as an ingredient.
Is sucralose safe to use?	The evidence shows that sucralose is safe to use. Most of the sucralose people consume is not absorbed and passes through the body. The little that is absorbed is excreted in the urine and doesn't accumulate in the body. A common sucralose myth is around chlorine content. There should be no concern over the chlorine content of sucralose; many foods naturally contain higher levels of chlorine.
Is stevia safe to use?	The evidence shows that stevia sweeteners are considered safe to use and have zero calories, but some products may contain other ingredients that have calories. These other ingredients, called bulking agents, may be used with stevia to provide better flavor or texture.
What should I drink?	Water is still the beverage to recommend as there is not enough evidence to recommend low calorie sweetened beverages as a long-term weight loss or maintenance strategy.