

Low-Calorie Sweeteners: What You Should Know

by Deanna Miller, RD, LD (NAPSA)—Sweet 'N Low, Equal, NutraSweet or Splenda? Are any of these low-calorie tabletop sweeteners in your cup of tea? If so, join the party. According to the Calorie Control Council, more than 163 million American adults consume low-calorie or sugar-free foods and beverages—nearly twice the number of a decade ago.

Yet, despite the rigorous safety testing and approvals by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), myths and misinformation continue to swirl around low-calorie sweeteners. And now, a number of self-proclaimed health experts are declaring some sweeteners “more natural” or “safer” than others—I say balderdash!

Myth One: Low-calorie sweeteners cause numerous scary health problems.

Fact: Aspartame is backed by more than 200 scientific studies conducted over three decades. The same degree of confidence holds true for all approved low-calorie sweeteners available today.

Myth Two: Saccharin causes tumors in humans.

Fact: This myth is based on outdated research from the 1970s. However, more recent research has shown that saccharin is clearly safe.

Myth Three: Some low-calorie sweeteners are safer than others.

Fact: Before any low-calorie sweetener appears on the market, it undergoes a rigorous safety approval process by the FDA. Because the approval process and standards are the same for all low-calorie sweeteners, there is no way one can be described as “safer” than another.



Across the board, low-calorie sweeteners are a safe alternative to sugar.

Myth Four: Sucralose, marketed as Splenda, is more natural than other low-calorie sweeteners because it's made from sugar.

Fact: Sucralose, Splenda's main sweetening ingredient, is artificial like other low-calorie sweeteners. It is made using a multi-step chemical process that adds chlorine to the final sweetener molecule. The addition of chlorine allows sucralose to retain its sweetness but makes it indigestible in the body. The FDA does not classify sucralose as “more natural” or “safer” than any other low-calorie sweetener.

Myth Five: Stevia comes from a plant and is natural, so it's better for you than other low-calorie sweeteners.

Fact: Stevia, or stevioside, is derived from a South American plant called *Stevia rebaudiana*. The FDA has not approved stevia

as a low-calorie sweetener because evidence demonstrating its safety is lacking.

Myth Six: Low-calorie sweeteners are only useful for people with diabetes.

Facts: Low-calorie sweeteners provide greater variety and flexibility in budgeting total carbohydrate and calorie intake, help with weight management and can satisfy a taste for sweets without affecting blood sugar or insulin levels. However, many people without diabetes also use low-calorie sweeteners to cut calories.

Myth Seven: You cannot cook or bake with low-calorie tabletop sweeteners.

Facts: None of the low-calorie tabletop sweeteners can replace sugar in all respects, such as adding bulk and texture and browning. Used correctly, however, these sweeteners will allow you to enjoy the foods you love without the extra sugar—and you can cook and bake with all of them successfully.

Myth Eight: Children and pregnant women should not use low-calorie sweeteners.

Facts: The FDA has approved the low-calorie sweeteners on the market today as safe for the general population, including children and pregnant women. However, because children and pregnant women have specific dietary needs, it's a good idea to speak with a physician or registered dietitian.

For more information on these sweeteners, check out www.sweetnlow.com, www.equal.com, www.nutrasweet.com or www.splenda.com.