

# NUTRITION



## FACT SHEET

### Straight Answers about Aspartame

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What is aspartame?

Aspartame is a low-calorie sweetening ingredient that provides the sweet taste of sugar without the calories. Aspartame has been used in numerous foods and beverages for 25 years and is enjoyed by millions of Americans every day.

#### **How is aspartame handled by the body?**

Aspartame is broken down in the body to the amino acids aspartic acid and phenylalanine as well as a small amount of methanol. These components are also found naturally in foods such as meats, milk, fruits and vegetables. The body uses these components in exactly the same way whether they come from aspartame or common foods. In fact, the foods you consume every day provide much greater amounts of these components than does aspartame.

#### **Is aspartame safe?**

Aspartame's safety has been documented in more than 200 objective scientific studies. The safety of aspartame has been confirmed by the regulatory authorities in more than 100 countries, including the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, the Joint Expert Committee on Food Additives (JECFA) of the World Health Organization and Food and Agriculture Organization, and the European Commission's Scientific Committee on Food.

#### **How can I tell which products contain aspartame?**

Aspartame is used to sweeten products such as low-calorie tabletop sweeteners, carbonated soft drinks, powdered soft drinks, puddings, gelatins, frozen desserts, yogurt, hot cocoa mixes, teas, breath mints, chewing gum and other foods, as well as some vitamin and cold preparations. To locate these products, look for the word "aspartame" on the ingredient list.

#### **Who can use aspartame?**

Consumers can enjoy products sweetened with aspartame as part of a healthful diet. Aspartame can

replace all or part of the sugar and calories in foods and beverages. Consumption of aspartame within the acceptable daily intake (ADI) set by FDA appears safe during pregnancy. The variety of foods and beverages sweetened with aspartame can help satisfy a pregnant woman's taste for "sweets" without adding extra calories. However, it is important to keep in mind that children, particularly young children, need ample calories for rapid growth and development. In addition, pregnant and breastfeeding women need to consume adequate calories to nourish the fetus or infant and should consult with a physician or a registered dietitian about their nutritional needs.

Individuals with the rare genetic disease, phenylketonuria (PKU), cannot properly metabolize phenylalanine. PKU is detected at birth through a mandatory screening program and these individuals must monitor their intake of phenylalanine from all foods, including foods containing aspartame. The following statement is, therefore, found on aspartame-containing products: "Phenylketonurics: contains phenylalanine."

#### **How do foods and beverages sweetened with aspartame fit into healthful eating?**

As a sweetener, aspartame can reduce or replace the sugar and calories in foods and beverages while maintaining great taste. Thus, aspartame offers one simple step to

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## Straight Answers about Aspartame (continued)

help people move closer to achieving a more healthful diet. Check the Nutrition Facts panel to see if aspartame-sweetened products provide the amount of calories, fat and carbohydrate that fits your eating plan.

Health experts agree that eating well and being physically active are keys to a healthful lifestyle. The World Health Organization recommends a number of dietary guidelines to combat increases in chronic diseases such as obesity, high blood pressure, cancer, and diabetes. One recommendation is to limit sugars added to some foods and beverages. A recent study suggests people who use low-calorie, sugar-free foods and beverages have better quality diets. Researchers found that those who incorporated reduced-calorie products consumed more vitamins and minerals such as calcium, fiber, iron and more in their diets. Thus, the researchers found while participants were eating fewer calories overall, they were also eating more healthfully.

### How do products sweetened with aspartame aid weight management?

With nearly two out of three Americans classified as overweight or obese, taking steps to assure appropriate caloric intake is important for many people. Because products with aspartame are lower in calories than their sugar-sweetened counterparts, using products with aspartame together with regular physical activity can help with weight management. Simply substituting a packet of tabletop sweetener with aspartame for two teaspoons of sugar three times daily in coffee, on cereal and in ice tea, for example—saves about 100 calories.

In addition, a 3-year scientific study done at Harvard Medical School showed that aspartame was a valuable aid to a long-term weight management program that included diet and physical activity.

### How does aspartame help people with diabetes?

Aspartame offers people with type 1 and type 2 diabetes greater variety and flexibility in budgeting their total carbohydrate intake and helps them satisfy their taste for sweets without affecting blood sugar. People with diabetes are more likely to stick with a healthful meal plan when they can include foods they enjoy. In addition, consuming products with aspartame can reduce calories, which helps people with diabetes manage their weight.

### Is there any truth to the negative information about aspartame I see on the Internet or in the media?

Negative allegations that aspartame may be associated with numerous ailments are not based on science. Unfortunately, urban myths about aspartame continue to be circulated over the Internet. Recently, a National Institutes of Health study, conducted by the National Cancer Institute, found that aspartame does not increase the risk of leukemia, lymphoma or brain cancer. Aspartame-sweetened products offer yet another choice for those individuals who want to limit calories and moderate sugar intake but not sacrifice great taste.

The safety of aspartame has been demonstrated numerous times, and backed by more than three decades of research and 200 scientific studies. Recently, several governments and expert committees carefully evaluated the Internet allegations and found them to be false, reconfirming the safety of aspartame. Leading health authorities, such as the American Medical Association, the American Dietetic Association, and the American Diabetes Association, agree that aspartame is safe when part of a healthy eating plan based on the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*.

For a referral to a registered dietitian and for additional food and nutrition information visit  
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Registered Dietitians are the experts when it comes to helping people eat well and stay healthy. An RD has the knowledge and expertise to develop an eating plan to meet the needs of all individuals.

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Additional information about aspartame can be found at  
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Calorie Control Council