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Sugar substitutes: Artificial sweeteners and sugar alcohols

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By offering the taste of sweetness without any calories, artificial sweeteners seem like they could be one answer to effective weight loss. The average 12-ounce can of sugar-sweetened soda delivers about 150 calories, almost all of them from sugar. The same amount of diet soda—zero calories. The choice seems like a no-brainer. Sugar is an inseparable part of the food we consume. But too much sugar is not ideal for our teeth and waistline. There have been some controversial suggestions that excessive sugar may play an important role in certain degenerative diseases. So artificial sweeteners or artificially sweetened products continue to attract consumers. A sugar substitute (artificial sweetener) is a food additive that duplicates the effect of sugar in taste, but usually has less food energy. Besides its benefits, animal studies have convincingly proven that artificial sweeteners cause weight gain, brain tumors, bladder cancer and many other health hazards. Some kind of health related side effects including carcinogenicity are also noted in humans. A large number of studies have been carried out on these substances with conclusions ranging from “safe under all conditions” to “unsafe at any dose”. Scientists are divided in their views on the issue of artificial sweetener safety. In scientific as well as in lay publications, supporting studies are often widely referenced while the opposing results are de-emphasized or dismissed. So this review aims to explore the health controversy over perceived benefits of sugar substitutes.

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