

# Food Fact - Sweeteners

People with diabetes do not need to avoid sugar altogether, but trying to reduce or limit your intake of sugar is recommended. Replacing sugar with low calorie sweeteners can be beneficial to manage your diabetes, maintain a healthy body weight and prevent tooth decay.

## What is a sweetener?

Sweeteners are ingredients added to foods to enhance sweetness. They are found in thousands of products in the UK and large studies have provided strong evidence that artificial sweeteners are safe for human consumption.

Sweeteners are closely regulated by government bodies such as the Food Standards Agency (FSA) to ensure safety. As part of this approval process an acceptable daily intake level (ADI) is set. The ADI is the estimated amount per kilogram of body weight that a person can consume on average, every day, over a lifetime without risk. To be cautious, ADI's are set at 100 times less than the smallest amount that may cause health concerns, so it is extremely difficult for most people to reach the ADI. It is personal choice if you decide to use sweeteners or not, but using a variety of brands can ensure you do not exceed an acceptable intake for any one sweetener.

One way of grouping sweeteners is to look at their nutritive contribution:

### 'Non-nutritive sweeteners'

'Non-nutritive sweeteners' have no nutritive value, they have little or no calories and can be a way of reducing overall calorie and carbohydrate intake. They are also known as 'low calorie sweeteners'. There are 6 varieties of 'non-nutritive'/ low calorie sweeteners approved for use in the UK:

Type of sweetener	Useful information	Brands containing this sweetener
<b>Saccharin</b>	Can be used in both hot and cold foods	Sweetex and Hermesetas minis
<b>Aspartame</b>	Better in cold foods as high temperatures reduce its sweetening effect	Candarel, Hermesetas granulated and NutraSweet
<b>Acesulfame-K</b>	Can be used in cooking because of its ability to resist heat	Hermesetas Gold, Sweet'N'Low, Sweetness and Light
<b>Sucralose</b>	Not affected by heat and retains its sweetness in cooking and hot drinks	Splenda
<b>Cyclamate</b>	Heat stable so suitable for cooking but only 10% as sweet as other low calorie sweeteners,	Hermesetas Liquid
<b>Stevia</b>	Naturally derived from the Stevia plant. Heat stable so can be used in cooking and baking. Can have a bitter aftertaste. Some stevia based sweeteners are blended with other sweetening ingredients (to offset this aftertaste), but be aware that some added ingredients may have blood glucose raising properties	Stevia and Truvia

## **'Nutritive' sweeteners**

'Nutritive' sweeteners have a nutritive value – they contain carbohydrate and provide calories. They are usually referred to as 'sugars' or 'added sugar', but can appear on food packaging in the ingredients list as:

- Glucose
- Fructose
- Sucrose
- Maltose
- Dextrose
- Honey
- Syrup

## **Polyols**

One sub-group of nutritive sweeteners is polyols, which are sugar alcohols. These include:

- Sorbitol (derived from corn syrup)
- Mannitol (derived from seaweed)
- Xylitol
- Erythritol
- Isomalt
- Maltitol
- Lactitol

Not all of the carbohydrate from polyols is absorbed, so it's unclear how polyols should be 'counted' by those adjusting their insulin dose according to their carbohydrate intake. Polyols are often used in products marketed as 'diabetic', which can be as high in fat and calories as standard products, so they are not recommended. Consuming large amounts of polyols can have a laxative effect, causing bloating, flatulence and diarrhoea. Speak to your health care team for individual advice before using them.

## **Cooking tips:**

- Most sweeteners are sweeter than sugar so only a small quantity is needed
- Experiment by reducing the sugar added to recipes. Most cakes will work with the sugar cut in half
- Follow the manufacturer's instructions when baking or cooking with sweeteners

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