

# Sweet Advice on Sugar Substitutes

Sugar substitutes, or artificial sweeteners, are used to make food taste sweet but they have very few calories. Artificial sweeteners have a different chemical makeup than sugars, so the amount you need to produce a sweet taste is different than for sugars. They generally don't affect your blood glucose or lipid levels.

## Are sugar substitutes safe?

Yes. Health Canada must approve all the artificial sweeteners that are sold in Canada. A sweetener has to undergo extensive research to show its safety and effectiveness before Health Canada will approve it for use. Once a sweetener is approved, Health Canada sets strict guidelines for how it can be used, as well as advice on Acceptable Daily Intake (ADI) levels.

The following shows the different types of sweeteners that have been approved for use in Canada:

Aspartame is marketed under the brand names of Equal™ and Nutrasweet™. It's used in soft drinks, yogurt, candy and as a table-top sweetener. It contains phenylalanine, so people with phenylketonuria (PKU) must avoid aspartame.

Sucralose is marketed under the brand name Splenda™. It is widely used in soft drinks, candy, baked goods and frozen desserts and ice cream products. It is also used for home cooking and baking.

Acesulfame potassium is not used as a table top sweetener. It's used only by food manufacturers as an ingredient for sweetening soft drinks and candy.

Sugar alcohols (sorbitol, mannitol, maltitol, xylitol) can't be bought as table sweeteners but are used by food manufacturers in foods and beverages such as candy, frozen desserts and ice cream products. Sugar alcohols aren't "true" artificial sweeteners – they do provide small amounts of calories which may affect blood glucose (sugar) levels. Large amounts (more than 10 grams/day) can cause diarrhea, cramps, gas and bloating.

Saccharin is marketed as the table top sweetener Hermesetas®. It can only be bought at pharmacies in Canada. If you are pregnant, check with your doctor before using saccharin.



Stevia leaf and extract of stevia leaves are approved for use as ingredients in certain natural health products. Purified stevia extract, also known as “steviol glycoside” is approved as a table top sweetener and food additive in some foods such as candy, gum, baking mixes and snacks.

Cyclamate is marketed as the table top sweeteners Sucaryl®, Sugar Twin® and Sweet ‘N Low® . It is not permitted as a food additive in Canada.

In moderation, artificial sweeteners can be part of your healthy eating plan.

If you are pregnant or breastfeeding, approved sweeteners, including aspartame, acesulfame potassium, sucralose and sugar alcohols, are considered safe; however, make sure artificially-sweetened foods are not replacing nutrient-rich foods you need for a [healthy pregnancy](#).



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