

HEALTH AND WELLNESS
Is There a Safe Sweetener and is MSG Safe?

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Everyone is so busy living their lives that often times, very important things are missed. All the while, potential life-altering decisions are made on a daily basis. Topics for this column are purposefully chosen for their long-term health implications. It's up to you to learn more, abide by these guidelines and/or simply ignore the contents. I sincerely hope that you chose one of the two former options and certainly not ignore this information. Making a few minor adjustments to your life and the lives of your loved ones will hopefully effectuate longer and healthier lives. Remember: "What you don't know can hurt you."

This month's topic is mostly about aspartame (NutraSweet, Equal, Spoonful and Equal-Measure), only briefly mentions sucralose (Splenda), saccharin (SugarTwin, Sweet'N Low), and also touches on monosodium glutamate (MSG). Aspartame is an artificial sweetener that is estimated to be consumed in more than 20 billion cans of "diet" soft drinks annually. The other artificial sweeteners have a share in the marketplace each with their own health threats. MSG is a flavor enhancer commonly added to Chinese food, canned vegetables, soups and processed meats. Next to salt and pepper, it is the most commonly used flavor enhancer today. MSG works by making your brain believe the food you are eating tastes good. It all goes to the bottom line of money since this allows manufacturers to save money by using poor quality, nutrient-deficient products.

MSG and aspartame are grouped together because they are neurotransmitters which cross the blood-brain barrier (designed to protect the brain from harmful chemicals). Aspartame and MSG have the potential to cause significant health problems, and in the case of aspartame in some people, even death. Children are even more susceptible because of their developing brains. The ironic thing about artificial sweeteners is that people actually gain weight using them.

Since neurotransmitters literally can get into your brain, here's a list of some of the many chronic illnesses that have contributed to long-term exposure to aspartame: Alzheimer's disease, brain lesions and dementia, epilepsy, hearing loss, hormonal problems, hypoglycemia, Lou Gehrig's Disease (ALS), memory loss, multiple sclerosis (MS), neuroendocrine disorders, Parkinson's disease and vision problems. Aspartame is also implicated in the following other documented symptoms: anxiety attacks, breathing difficulties, depression, dizziness, fatigue, headaches/migraines, heart palpitations, hearing loss, insomnia, irritability, joint pain, loss of taste, muscle spasms, nausea, numbness, rashes, seizures, slurred speech, tachycardia, tinnitus (ringing in the ear), vertigo, vision problems and weight gain. As if all that were not enough, several of the above illnesses as well as the following chronic illnesses can be triggered or worsened by ingesting of aspartame: birth defects, brain tumors, chronic fatigue syndrome, diabetes, fibromyalgia, lymphoma and mental retardation.

While reading labels is a good start, unfortunately, current labeling regulations make it possible to conceal from the public information needed to make good decisions about health. For example, these products may be included under other terms like "enhanced flavors or spices." The public needs to be aware of these problems and demand more information.

Given everything we know, here is this author's advice: (1) avoid MSG as much as possible; and (2) use one of the following natural sweeteners instead of an artificial one: (a) date sugar, (b) honey, (c) maple sugar, (d) maple syrup, (e) molasses, or (f) agave nectar.

This article is only a very brief explanation of the topic. You are encouraged to read as much as you can about this important topic to make the most informed decision possible for you and your family. Here are a few links to get you started:

- (1) <http://aspartame.mercola.com/>
- (2) <http://www.sweetpoison.com/>
- (3) <http://www.naturoidoc.com/library/nutrition/aspartame.htm>
- (4) <http://hubpages.com/hub/What-is-MSG-and-Why-is-it-Bad-for-Your-Health>
- (5) <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/artificial-sweeteners/MY00073>

Disclaimer for this article and all others written by Laura Jimenez, MSW: Of course, no one person knows all the medical or other answers for themselves much less other people. These articles are intended as a reference only. The information provided is designed to save and improve lives by helping others to make informed decisions about health issues. It is not intended as a substitute for any treatment that has been doctor prescribed. If anyone reading this article suspects a medical problem, please seek competent medical care in a timely fashion.

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