

# Sweet 'n faux

By Logan Kugler

When it comes to artificial sweeteners, how can you tell the difference? We've got answers and all-natural alternatives.

**S**ugar. It's a constant seduction. The temptation of sweets, goodies, cakes and candies surrounds us all the time. And if you're trying to lose weight, you know how difficult it is to resist.

Enter artificial sweeteners. Thanks to those little pink, blue and yellow packages, we can have all the things we enjoy without all the calories or a horrible taste. But what's really in those magic packets? And could something so tasty possibly be good for you?

## Equal

**Truth:** Of the three major sweeteners, Equal is the most detrimental to your health because it contains a chemical called aspartame. Aspartame contains more than 92 adverse side effects and, because it dissolves into what it's added to (similar to the other two artificial sweeteners), it travels through the entire body. This means it deposits in the body tissue and stays there for three to five years.



**Effects:** The components of aspartame can lead to a number of health problems. Side effects can occur immediately or over time. According to Dr. Lendon Smith, many people suffer from these side effects but have no idea why drugs, supplements and herbs don't relieve their symptoms. It's because aspartame locks itself inside body tissues for many years, so



Pink, yellow and blue: Sure, they're all different colors, but what else makes each artificial sweetener unique?

no drug can remedy the problem until the chemical releases itself from the body tissue. Some of the side effects associated with aspartame include: blindness, hearing impairment, recurring migraines, dizziness, depression, anxiety, high blood pressure, diarrhea, skin reactions, diabetes, birth defects, suicidal tendencies, Alzheimer's disease and irritability.

**Alternative:** Blackstrap molasses. Sweeter than white table sugar and nearly as sweet as aspartame, blackstrap molasses is an organically produced sweetener that has many health benefits and zero side effects. The sweetener has been known to reverse gray hair in older men and women and is a great source of potassium, magnesium, copper, iron, calcium and manganese.

*continued on page 34*



continued from page 32



## Splenda

**Truth:** Splenda, the middle man of harm in artificial sweeteners, is derived from sucralose and also has its share of side effects. Discovered in 1976, sucralose can now be found in more than 3,500 food and beverage products around the world. And for good reason: Sucralose is 600 times sweeter than table sugar, twice as sweet as saccharin (Sweet 'n Low) and four times as sweet as aspartame (Equal). The sweetener was deemed safe by the Federal Drug Administration in 1998, but sucralose has been scientifically proven to cause mutations, birth defects and even negative effects on the thymus gland (which is important to the immune system).

**Effects:** Sucralose could be considered a lesser health risk when compared to aspartame. It has a good safety profile (it's the only artificial sweetener deemed safe for those with diabetes), but it also has its share of nasty side effects. A number of these side effects include: reduced growth rate, decreased red blood cell count, diarrhea, enlarged liver and kidneys, significantly shrunken thymus glands, depression, swollen face, mouth sores, blurred vision and extreme fatigue.

**Alternative:** Sucanat (Sugar Cane Natural). Made from evaporating the water in cane juice, Sucanat is a pure, organic,

Research shows that 15 percent of aspartame, saccharine and even sucralose is absorbed into your digestive system and stored in your body for many years.

unrefined cane sugar that's rich in vitamins and minerals (calcium, iron, magnesium and potassium) and is comparable in sweetness to artificial sweeteners. Simply put, Sucanat is sugar in its most natural form.



## Sweet 'n Low

**Truth:** Saccharin is the main ingredient of Sweet 'n Low, which is considered the least harmful of the three sweeteners. Saccharin was created in 1879 and was banned in 1911 because of uncertainty over its health risks. However, in 1977 the FDA lifted the ban and let consumers decide whether or not to use the sweetener. It also required that any saccharin product carry a warning label about cancer (this requirement was lifted in 1996). More research on saccharin confirmed that with heavy use, the sweetener does

indeed increase your risk of bladder cancer. "Heavy use" is defined as "two or more canned sodas per day" or "six or more packets per day."

**Effects:** Sweet 'n Low does not promote good health, but if you must use an artificial sweetener (for example, if you are a diabetic), you're better off using a saccharin product (Sweet 'n Low) over those containing aspartame (Equal) or even sucralose (Splenda). In fact, the only side effect of Sweet 'n Low is the chance of getting bladder cancer. And that's only if you're a heavy user of the sweetener. If you use one packet a week, or even one packet a day, you have almost nothing to worry about (almost).

**Alternatives:** Rapadura or Stevia powder. Similar to Sucanat, rapadura is an unrefined organic sugar that, unlike refined sugars, is not separated from the molasses and provides a sweetness that is rich in nutrients, vitamins and minerals. Some think rapadura tastes mildly like caramel, which makes it superb for baking and sweetening food and drinks.

Often called "nature's sweet leaf," stevia powder is an extraordinarily sweet herb that's 300 times sweeter than table sugar. For some, its taste takes getting used to, but for the medicinal value it provides, it's well worth learning to love. Stevia powder is also calorie-free and does not trigger a rise in blood sugar, so you won't get a sudden burst of energy followed by fatigue, as is common with processed and nonorganic sugars. ■

## Wanna quit cold turkey?

If you want to scrap your sugar but all this faux stuff has you frustrated, try adding these to spice up your food and satisfy your sweet tooth:

**Cinnamon:** Purchase in stick form to boil into hot drinks like cider or soy milk for sweetness. Sprinkle into coffee for aroma and flavor. You can even stir it into plain yogurt to make a tasty sugar-free dessert.

**Nutmeg:** This mellow, nutty spice

tastes great in drinks when combined with cloves or cinnamon. It works with almost all baked goods and especially with cheese dishes.

**Vanilla bean:** Add it to your puddings or sauces for that subtly sweet hint of vanilla.

Anise seed or licorice root: You can chew on the seed for a sweet dessert that will freshen your breath. Use it to add flavor to fruit, cottage cheese, breads or even salad dressing. Licorice tea has a naturally sweet taste without any sugar at all.