

- Sugar substitutes

How safe and healthy are sugar alternatives

Oman Daily Observer · 8 Feb 2023 · 8 · Dr Nisma Haris The writer is a general physician, content creator

Sugar alternatives are no longer confined to diabetics or with other medical conditions rather they have taken the fitness world by storm. Wanting to get slimmer, your step one approach is cutting your sugar and stacking your kitchen shelf with sugar alternatives.

But how safe and healthier choices do they project? Let's take it from the beginning; "What is sugar and how much does your body need?" Sugar is a simple carbohydrate that our body needs as a primary energy source.

Usually, the sugar needs of the body are met through the food we eat, and our body doesn't need any further sugar. Natural sugar sources include lactose in milk, sucrose in sugar-cane, glucose in honey, fructose in fruits. Anything we eat is ultimately broken down to glucose (simplest sugar) to be utilised by the body for energy. Well, is there any limit to added sugar intake?

The AHA (American Heart Association) suggests a stricter added-sugar limit of no more than 100 calories per day (about 6 teaspoons or 24 grams) for most adult women and no more than 150 calories per day (about 9 teaspoons or 36 grams of sugar) for most men. The AHA also recommends a lower daily limit of added sugars for children ages 2-18 to less than 6 teaspoons or 24 grams per day, and sugary beverages should be limited to no more than 8 ounces a week. And certainly, this means taking into account all food sources that say added sugar; not just direct sources.

What are various sweeteners and how safe are they? Natural, artificial, and alcoholbased sweeteners are in mainstream consumption.

Typically, they contain fewer or zero calories and appear sweet to the tongue receptors owing to their resemblance with the sugar molecules.

As they are devoid of any calories, they help in reducing appetite and thereby encourage weight loss. So, switching to sugar substitutes a healthier choice?

These sweeteners do not contain calories or sugar, but they also don't have beneficial nutrients like vitamins, fibre, minerals, or antioxidants.

They are regulated by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) as food additives. (John Hopkins Medicine). Do sugar alternatives cause cancer or other issues? A prevalent myth circulates that sugar alternatives cause cancer. However, recent studies indicate the unlikelihood of any such claims.

They might cause gut issues, headaches, or dizziness in some owing to individual tolerance but by and large they are considered safe to use.

The keynote is don't give up on carbs altogether in the name of sugar. Instead check for added sugar that might be finding its way into your body through sauces, energy bars, juices, or other sweetened foodstuffs.

Incorporate healthier carbs, cut down on refined ones, and go for sugar alternatives in moderation keeping in mind the pros and cons.

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