

Saccharin sweet is actually good

DH Photo: Nagesh Polali

Don't be scared of saccharin anymore. The risk of getting cancer due to the use of artificial sweeteners is small, almost zero, write Dr T K Sabeer and Dr Arpandev Bhattacharyya.



Don't throw away your artificial sweeteners just because sugar is safer than you thought. Artificial sweeteners are 'free foods'. They make food taste sweet, but they have no calories and do not raise blood glucose levels. They do not count as a carbohydrate, a fat, or any other exchange. They can be added to your meal plan instead of being substituted.

Saccharin

The first artificial sweetener available in the market was saccharin and its use was limited due to the widespread fear of bladder cancer. Large amounts of saccharin cause cancer in laboratory animals, such as rats. Evidence from studies done on people suggests that saccharin does not cause cancer in humans. Saccharin can be used in both hot and cold foods to make them sweeter.

Saccharin may help people who have diabetes or are obese stick to a healthy, low-calorie meal plan. However, the American Diabetes Association recom-

People with diabetes and those who want to treat obesity can safely use artificial sweeteners.

mends that pregnant women avoid heavy use of saccharin.

Only you can decide how to balance a small - or possibly even zero - risk of cancer against the large known risk of being overweight or not keeping your diabetes under control. Other artificial sweeteners are available if you do not want to use saccharin.

Aspartame

Aspartame is the next one available. Aspartame is a newer artificial sweetener, and because it is 180 times as sweet as sugar, you need only a tiny amount to sweeten your food. So, even though it does have calories, it adds almost no calories to food because you use

so little. Extensive investigation so far hasn't shown any serious side effects from aspartame.

One problem with aspartame is that it loses its sweetness when heated. As a result, you cannot use it in baked goods, such as cakes. You can use it in top-of-the-stove foods, like pudding, by adding it at the very end of cooking.

Aspartame has been determined safe by the US Food and Drug Administration and other scientific and regulatory authorities worldwide. It is one of the most thoroughly studied food ingredients, with more than 200 scientific studies confirming its safety. Reports of a preliminary unpublished rat study are un-

supported and totally contradictory to the extensive scientific research and regulatory reviews conducted on aspartame. The October 2, 2004 issue of the British Medical Journal (BMJ) carries an editorial concluding that aspartame has been "demonised unfairly" in sections of the press and on the internet.

The BMJ editorial continues: "Evidence does not support links between aspartame and cancer, hair loss, depression, dementia, behavioural disturbances, or any of the other conditions appearing in web-sites."

Sucratose is a tabletop sweetener and is used in products such as baked goods, nonalcoholic beverages,

chewing gum, frozen dairy desserts, fruit juices and gelatins.

Acesulfame potassium

Acesulfame potassium is the newest artificial sweetener on the market is acesulfame potassium. This sweetener can be used in baking and cooking because it does not break down when heated. But the texture of baked goods is not the same with acesulfame-K as with sugar. To get a good texture, you might need to add some sugar.

In all, the people who can safely use artificial sweeteners are those with diabetes and those who want to reduce calorie intake for treatment/prevention of obesity.

