

Sugar Sub Suspicions

Even though the FDA has ruled that sugar substitutes are safe, there is growing research that questions just how healthy they are; and a number of groups question their safety. Some of my clients have had troubling reactions to sugar substitute, which solidifies my own belief that they are better avoided.

One client was suddenly gaining 2 pounds a week. She realized that at the same time this started she began chewing a sugar-free gum with sorbitol. Once she stopped using the gum, she started losing weight again.

Another client had a two month history of being constantly hungry and fatigued. The only change she could think of was that she had just started drinking Coca Cola Zero. Within 72 hours of stopping the diet cola, the hunger went away and her energy levels returned to normal.

These are anecdotal, but they sure got my attention. It makes me wonder how many others have symptoms related to sugar-free products. If you have been using those products, and have increased hunger, fatigue, or weight gain, maybe they are connected. It would be an easy experiment to try stopping the diet products and see if anything changes.

When you look at the risks, you have to ask if it is worth it. Studies have shown that sugar-free foods increase the risk of metabolic syndrome (a constellation of symptoms that are strongly linked to heart disease, stroke and diabetes). And in a recent experiment rats fed sugar-free yogurt gained more weight than rats fed regular yogurt with sugar.

The May 2008 Nutrition Action Healthletter, published by the Center for Science in the Public Interest, had an article exploring the safety of various food additives. They recommended avoiding acesulfame potassium (Sunett), aspartame (NutraSweet), saccharin (Sweet 'n Low) and stevia. They considered Sucralose (Splenda) the safest of the sugar substitutes. However Duke University has just published a study showing that Splenda contributes to obesity, destroys good intestinal bacteria and prevents prescription drugs from being absorbed. Even though this study is being challenged by others who point out that it was funded by the Sugar Association, I think it raises questions about a substance that we don't really need.

Regardless of whether you believe sugar substitutes are safe or not, I recommend avoiding them because I think they make us crave sweets. Because sugar substitute is so sweet (500+ times the sweetness of sugar) – it trains us to expect foods to be very sweet, which prompts us to eat more in the long run.



What are the alternatives? Drink more water! Try unsweetened iced green tea or herb tea instead of diet sodas. For a delicious mint water, add a few sprigs of mint to a pitcher of water and allow it to sit at room temperature for a few hours.

It is a good thing to limit your use of sweeteners in general. If you really need some sugar, whatever type you use won't matter too much if you use it sparingly. But I'd still suggest using a caloric type, unless you are diabetic. With diabetes, the best choice depends on the person and the circumstances.

When you cut down on sweets, both caloric and non-caloric versions, you will crave them less. If you want something sweet, consider teas with a sweet flavor (such as good earth, fruit or nut flavored, etc), a square of dark chocolate (70+% cocoa) or a little dried fruit. I especially like dried dates. As you cut down on sugar, fruits will taste more sweet.

Bottom line: get used to less sweetness. Taste preferences are habit and once we get used to foods being less sweet that's what we prefer. If you use sugar-free products, try an experiment: eliminate them and see if you feel better.



Haunted by Halloween Candy

Halloween is the gateway to the fall season of food-related holidays. Those innocent-looking tiny candy bars can haunt us when we can't stop eating them.

Plan ahead to avoid mindless munching. Check out my recent article titled "Ten Tricks to Avoid Halloween Treats". You can find it in the Healdsburg Tribune, Rohnert Park Community Voice, or my website: <http://HealthyHabitsCoach.com/nutrition.htm>.

I have a request: please don't take Halloween candy to work, school, or wherever you might consider taking the leftovers. It can be a tempting way to get them out of your home, but you are just passing on the temptation to others. Just toss the leftovers. It is better that they go to waste than to your waist.

Want Support? *Many of my clients know what to eat but want support with actually doing it. It helps to have someone help you choose a strategy and stay focused. Sessions range from 30 min by phone to 1-2 hours in person. Call me to discuss what would work best for you.*

Kathy Nichols: Life Coach & Registered Dietitian

Are you ready to stop dieting and looking for a way of eating that is sustainable, enjoyable and healthy?

Discover Wellness from the Inside Out!

