GET THE FACTS: Low- and No-Calorie Sweetened Drinks

Low- and no-calorie sweeteners are man-made sweeteners that are much sweeter than regular sugar but have few to no calories.¹

- Low- and no-calorie sweeteners are sometimes called artificial sweeteners, high-intensity sweeteners, and non-nutritive sweeteners.¹³
- There are 19 different low- and no-calorie sweeteners,⁴ six of which are approved by the US Food and Drug Administration as food additives: advantame, aspartame, acesulfame potassium, neotame, saccharin, and sucralose.¹
- Two other kinds of low- and no-calorie sweeteners—steviol glycosides from the stevia plant and extracts from the monk fruit—are considered “Generally Recognized as Safe,” which allows them to be used in food and drinks.²

Data from 2009-2012 show that about 19% of kids and 31% of adults in the US drink beverages made with low- and no-calorie sweeteners.⁵

- This is a big increase from 1999-2000, when only 6% of kids and about 19% of adults were drinking these beverages.⁶
- During both of these time periods, non-Hispanic White Americans were more likely to report drinking these beverages than non-Hispanic African Americans and Hispanic Americans as well as those with a high income compared to those with a middle or low income.⁵⁶

There are mixed findings about the health effects of drinking low- and no-calorie sweetened drinks and multiple concerning studies.⁷⁸ Ongoing research is looking at long-term impacts on the body for kids and adults.⁹

- There’s some good evidence that suggests replacing sugary drinks (like soda) with low- and no-calorie sweetened drinks is a strategy to avoid excess weight gain in children.¹⁰
- However, experts suggest replacing sugary and artificially-sweetened drinks with water, if possible. Water is an excellent beverage choice, especially for kids. It’s perfect for hydration, very affordable, has no calories, and fluoridated water helps protect teeth.¹¹

WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE?

See the list of references for this fact sheet:
www.hsph.harvard.edu/prc/priority-areas/sugary-drinks/low-no-calorie-sweetened-drinks

The following additional resources may be useful:

SUGGESTED CITATION


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