

Are Artificial Sweeteners Hijacking Your Biblical Pursuit of Health?

If you drink or eat anything with artificial sweeteners, you might want to reconsider. New research shows they can hurt our brains and heart and, believe it or not, don't even help us lose weight.

Sadly, our country's weight problem is only getting worse. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports a staggering 71 percent of adults qualify as overweight or obese. That translates into increased rates of various health problems such as heart disease, cancer and diabetes.

It's not just America. In June, *The New England Journal of Medicine* reported much of the entire world is getting fatter and paying a price: four million deaths, 60 percent caused by obesity, and the other 40 percent from "just" being overweight.

No. 1 Enemy: Sugar

Experts say the root cause of the weight problem can be summed up in one word: sugar. Most Americans consume more than 150 pounds a year, often hidden in foods you'd never expect and obvious in others. For example, just one can of soda contains more than nine teaspoons of sugar.

With that in mind, it's no wonder so many people turn to diet sodas containing zero-calorie artificial sweeteners in an effort to reduce their sugar intake. But that's a bad choice for a number of reasons.

Diet Sodas Increase Dementia and Stroke Risk

A new study out of Boston University revealed people who drink diet soda have three times the risk of developing dementia and having a stroke, and that's people who drink just one a day.

Cleveland Clinic's Chief Wellness Officer Dr. Michael Roizen, author of the book, *Age Proof*, advises people to avoid diet sodas as well as the hundreds of other products containing fake sugar. "Artificial sweeteners, we think, are much worse than we ever thought," he said.

Artificial Sweeteners Increase Bad Bacteria

Dr. Roizen believes the main problem with artificial sweeteners such as aspartame, saccharine and sucralose is that they can disrupt our internal microbiome, also known as our gut flora.

"Your microbiome is the bacteria inside your gut," Dr. Roizen explained. "Those artificial sweeteners cause a separate breed of bacteria to grow inside you."

Dr. David Perlmutter, a neurologist and author of *Brain Maker*, says artificial sweeteners throw off the delicate balance of good and bad bacteria. He says when that happens, our minds suffer the consequences.

"The bacteria that live within our gut nurture the brain when they're treated right," Perlmutter explained, "They reduce inflammation for example. Inflammation is the key player that causes Multiple Sclerosis, Parkinson's and even Alzheimer's, and Coronary Artery Disease and Diabetes for that matter."

Perlmutter recommends boosting good gut bacteria for optimal brain health. That involves avoiding artificial sweeteners. It also means consuming probiotics, which can be found in supplements as well as in foods such as yogurt and fermented vegetables such as kimchi.

Perlmutter also suggests consuming pre-biotics to nurture the

good gut bacteria. They can be found in supplements as well as foods like dandelion greens and jicama.

Artificial Sweeteners Cause Weight Gain

People consume artificial sweeteners to control their weight. But, believe it or not, a number of scientific studies reveal they actually cause us to gain weight. One reason goes back to the gut.

“The body thinks it’s starving and holds on to every calorie that a person consumes because of changes in the gut bacteria,” Dr. Perlmutter explained, “The risk of developing diabetes is dramatically increased two-fold in people who drink a lot of sugarless beverages. Who knew.”

Some Fake Sugars Are Better Than Others

Nutritionist J.J. Virgin, author of *The Sugar Impact Diet*, says the artificial sweeteners Stevia, Xylitol, Erithrotol and Monk Fruit (also called Lo Han) appear to be much healthier choices than the others, especially when it comes to gut health.

However, she cautions even the healthiest artificial sweeteners can lead to weight gain. “There’s also a phenomenon that happens called calorie dysregulation that they saw with artificial sweeteners,” Virgin explained, “When you eat something that’s got a sweet taste with no calories, your body can’t calibrate the degree of sweetness with how many calories, so it causes you to tend to overeat.”

Not only that, but our DNA plays a role in artificial sweeteners leading to weight gain. Genetics predispose an estimated three-fourths of people to have an addiction to sweets. Put simply, that means among three out of four people, the more artificial sweeteners they consume, the more they crave all sweets, fake and real.

With that in mind, health experts say the best plan is to turn off the sweet tooth. Do that by removing sweet from your taste buds altogether. Dr. Roizen said it's not as difficult as it sounds.

"Sweet is a learned taste. If you go off sweet, if you go off sugar, your brain doesn't get used to it. Your taste buds aren't used to it. You can avoid it, and that's a much healthier state," he said.

J.J. Virgin proved this theory by testing 700 self-proclaimed sugar addicts.

"First, we taper down for a week, we don't go cold turkey, but then we lower their sugar impact down," she recalled. "We start using more spices, more savory and getting enough protein in and getting enough healthy fats in. And then at the end of two weeks we go back and test, and these sugar addicts told me that sweet food just tasted gross."

So while eating too much sugar is definitely hazardous to our health, artificial sweeteners can be just as bad for us, maybe even worse. That's why the healthiest solution is to remove all sweets from the diet, both real and fake. {eoa}

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