Risks of aspartame? [1]

Alice,

Are there any health risks involved from the consumption of aspartame sweetener?

? Diet Coke

Answer

Dear Diet Coke,

Aspartame ? how sweet it is! A common artificial sweetener used in various foods and drinks, aspartame is about 200 times sweeter than sugar. However, it contains fewer calories than sugar, making it a substitute for individuals who wish to cut back on sugar. To date, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) considers aspartame safe to use, though it recommends maximum levels of acceptable daily intake (ADI) for children and adults.

An adult weighing 150 pounds (70 kilograms) can have up to 3,500 milligrams per day of aspartame. In terms of diet soda, this translates into no more than 19 cans of diet soda per day (diet soda typically contains 180 milligrams of aspartame per can). A child who typically weighs 66 pounds (30 kilograms) could drink up to eight cans of diet soda before going over the ADI for children. That's still quite a lot of soda! There may be other considerations, such as caffeine and the acid in soda that can damage teeth, to weigh before drinking a case a day.

There is no conclusive data demonstrating that aspartame poses a safety risk to humans. However, the FDA has noted some possible, but uncommon, side effects of aspartame consumption. These complaints have included headaches, dizziness, stomach problems, and changes in mood. One particular safety risk of aspartame involves individuals with phenylketonuria (PKU). PKU is a rare genetic disease characterized by the inability to break down the amino acid phenylalanine, which is found in aspartame. It's recommended that people with PKU avoid all products that contain aspartame. These products are labeled for easier recognition.

You may want to keep in mind that aspartame and other artificial sweeteners are not exactly a green light to consume excessive amounts of foods and drinks that contain it, as the calories still add up. Research suggests artificial sweeteners may stimulate a person's appetite. Because they have no caloric content, they don't seem to activate the same food reward signals in the brain that induce feelings of satiety. As a result, craving a sweet flavor after eating artificially sweetened foods but not feeling full or satisfied by them may lead to
overeating.

If you're concerned about the safety of aspartame, you can always check the labels of the foods and drinks before you buy them. You may also want to consider discussing any concerns with a health care provider, who may be able to suggest other sweetening alternatives.

Here's hoping that this response didn't sugarcoat your concerns!

Alice!

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