

Aspartame and Other Sweeteners in Food



FDA Response to External Safety Reviews of Aspartame

The FDA is aware of the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) and Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives (JECFA) conclusions about aspartame issued July 14, 2023. Aspartame being labeled by IARC as “possibly carcinogenic to humans” does not mean that aspartame is actually linked to cancer.

The FDA disagrees with IARC’s conclusion that these studies support classifying aspartame as a possible carcinogen to humans. FDA scientists reviewed the scientific information included in IARC’s review in 2021 when it was first made available and identified significant shortcomings in the studies on which IARC relied. We note that JECFA did not raise safety concerns for aspartame under the current levels of use and did not change the Acceptable Daily Intake (ADI).

Aspartame is one of the most studied food additives in the human food supply. FDA scientists do not have safety concerns when aspartame is used under the approved conditions. The sweetener is approved in many countries. Regulatory and scientific authorities, such as [Health Canada](#) and the [European Food Safety Authority](#) have evaluated aspartame and also consider it safe at current permitted use levels.

Some consumers may rely on products with aspartame and other sweeteners to help reduce their sugar consumption. We recognize that navigating different information from health organizations is challenging. We will continue to provide reliable, science-based information on aspartame and other sweeteners on the FDA’s web site to help consumers make informed choices.

Sweeteners or sugar substitutes, such as aspartame, sucralose, and stevia derived substances, are ingredients used to sweeten and in some cases enhance the flavor of foods. Some sweeteners are much sweeter than table sugar, and smaller amounts are needed to achieve the same level of sweetness as sugar in food. People may choose to use sweeteners instead of sugar for various reasons. For example, sweeteners contribute only a few or no calories to the diet and generally will not raise blood sugar levels.

Sweeteners are widely used in foods and beverages marketed as “sugar-free” or “diet,” including baked goods, soft drinks, powdered drink mixes, candy, puddings, canned foods, jams and jellies, dairy products, and many other foods and beverages. Consumers can identify whether a product has a sweetener by looking for the sweetener’s name in the ingredient list on the product label.

By [law](#), like all other ingredients added to food in the U.S., sweeteners must be safe for consumption. Companies are responsible for ensuring the regulatory status and safety of the ingredients in their products before marketing. Under its legal authorities, the FDA administers pre-market regulatory programs that assist companies in meeting their obligations. To market a new food additive or before using a food additive in a different way than how the FDA has currently approved it, a manufacturer or other sponsor must first seek approval from the FDA by submitting a [food additive petition](#). Under the law, certain ingredients do not require pre-market food additive approval by FDA, for example, if they are generally recognized as safe (GRAS) by qualified experts. If a company concludes that the specific use of a sweetener is GRAS, they may submit their information to the FDA through the [FDA’s GRAS Notification Program](#). Information about the regulatory status of sweeteners is available in the [Code of Federal Regulations](#) and the FDA’s public [GRAS Notice Inventory](#) and [Substances Added to Food \(formerly EAFUS\) Inventory](#).

The FDA continues to monitor the latest science available on sweeteners in a variety of ways. FDA scientists reassess the science about the exposure and safety of a sweetener each time the agency files a food additive petition or a GRAS notice for that sweetener. We also stay abreast of published literature and the current level of consumer exposure and participate in international scientific and standard-setting activities related to food ingredient safety.