

Aspartame: What You Should Know

Aspartame is a sweetener used in foods. It is found in NutraSweet, Equal, diet sodas, various brands of tea mixes, chocolate mixes, cookies, gelatins, puddings pre-sweetened cereals, yogurt, gums, etc. Over half the adult population consumes products containing aspartame. It is promoted by a multibillion-dollar industry as a way to avoid sugar and lose weight.

Although the FDA has received thousands of reports of adverse effects from this chemical, little regard has been given to its serious health effects. H. J. Roberts, MD, FACP, FCCP, is director of Palm Beach Institute for Medical Research and on staff at St. Mary's and Good Samaritan Hospitals in Florida. During his many years of practice and research, he discovered what he calls "Aspartame Disease." In his book, "Aspartame, Is it Safe?" he explains his experience.

Patients reported various, seemingly unrelated symptoms such as: headache, dizziness, nausea, weight gain, mood changes, anxiety attacks, chest pain, swelling, diarrhea, abdominal pain, vision changes, fatigue, seizures, sleep problems, memory loss, rash, ringing in the ear, numbness, etc. Patients avoided aspartame for two weeks to see if symptoms changed. Most of their complaints lessened or disappeared when aspartame products were stopped and recurred after resuming the products.

Aspartame is made of three chemicals: aspartic acid (40%), phenylalanine (50%), and methanol (10%). The first two are amino acids (building blocks of proteins) and methanol (methyl alcohol) is a known toxin. In the small intestine, the methanol is metabolized producing formaldehyde (a deadly neurotoxin), which is then converted into formic acid. Within cells, formaldehyde and its breakdown products damage cellular proteins, impair DNA function, and cause retinal damage, among other things. (Methanol, from the Emergency Medicine and Primary Homecare page and Neurotoxic Interaction of MSG, Aspartame, and other Toxins, text from Dr. Markle, as self-appointed expert on aspartame.)

Dr. Roberts claims that these chemicals are responsible for many symptoms. For some it appears to be addictive. Once eliminated,

some experience withdrawal symptoms such as severe irritability, tension, depression, tremors, nausea, sweating and craving for the products. The symptoms usually cease once the product is reintroduced. Dr. Roberts strongly recommends that children, pregnant women and diabetics avoid use. The chemicals can cross the placenta becoming 3 or 4 times more concentrated. He says children often have more severe reactions. He always associates it with brain tumors.

If you research this topic, you will find some claiming it's safe and others, like Dr. Roberts, warning of its dangers. If you consume aspartame and experience any symptoms, eliminate aspartame for two weeks and see if your symptoms subside. If they do, avoid it. Introduce other drinks (water, carbonated and flavored water, sodas with natural sweeteners, herbal teas (iced or hot). Read labels to avoid products containing aspartame. The FDA has received many complaints about aspartame. Dr. Roberts' and others think it should be banned. Don't wait until the experts are in agreement. Take steps to see if it is a problem for you and your family.