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Debunking The Aspartame Myth

By News Canada

Debunking The Aspartame Myth

by: News Canada

(NC)–Whether or not you've ever consumed products containing aspartame, you've surely heard all kinds of things about it – many of them contradictory. So who's telling the truth? Dr. Joe Schwarcz, Director of the McGill University Office for Chemistry and Society, devotes an entire chapter to aspartame in his new book *That's the Way the Cookie Crumbles*. He maintains that aspartame is safe: "Aspartame has probably been studied more than any other food additive. The vast body of research conducted over the past 20 years has shown it to be harmless to health."

Aspartame has given rise to many popular myths. But if you want to get to the bottom of things, you can't rely solely on rumours and hearsay: it's important to separate myth from reality. Myth: Daily consumption of aspartame–sweetened products is harmful to your health. Reality: Aspartame has undergone close to 200 studies over the past 20 years and is approved by Health Canada since 1981. Aspartame is used in thousands of products. The Acceptable Daily Intake recommended by Health Canada is approximately 3,000 mg/per person/per day. So, you would have to eat or drink the equivalent of 100 low-cal yogurt cups (113g) sweetened with aspartame, 20 cans of soft drink sweetened with aspartame, or 97 packets of the tabletop sweetener. The average Canadian consumes about 500 mg of aspartame per day, which is well below the acceptable limit. Myth: Aspartame causes headaches. Reality: Headaches can be caused by many factors, including stress and lack of sleep, as well as a variety of physiological and psychological disorders. It has not been proven that aspartame is more likely to cause headaches than other products. If you have headaches, it is important to consult your doctor to have a proper diagnosis made. Myth: Aspartame is harmful to people who are affected by diabetes because it increases blood sugar levels. Reality: According to the Canadian Diabetes Association, all sweeteners available in Canada go through rigorous testing. Once they have been approved it means that they are suitable for use by all Canadians, including those with diabetes. Since aspartame is a non-caloric sugar substitute that gives food a sweet taste without raising the level of glucose in the blood, people with diabetes can turn to aspartame–sweetened products to increase their variety of foods, while maintaining a diet appropriate for their condition. Myth: Aspartame is harmful to pregnant women and children. Reality: Aspartame is deemed safe by Health Canada. It is safe for

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pregnant women and children. Given that both groups have high energy requirements, however, it is important that their diets contain all the calories required for health, growth and development. People with phenylketonuria are one exception. This is a rare, hereditary disease that prevents the proper metabolism of phenylalanine, a substance found in protein foods such as chicken, milk and vegetables, and also in aspartame.

So before jumping to conclusions, be sure to get the scientific facts straight!

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The Sweet Side Of Science

By News Canada

(NC)–Everybody's heard of aspartame. The list of products using it for sweetness is long, including breakfast cereals, soft drinks, desserts and yogurt. But what exactly is aspartame?

Aspartame is a tabletop sweetener that gives foods a sweet taste, but contains a negligible amount of calories and carbohydrate. Aspartame is not the only sugar substitute to have these properties. Sucralose is another sweetener like aspartame that is used in numerous food products. Based on its name, you might think it's sugar, but it's not! What is the difference between these two tabletop sweeteners? Basically, the difference is in their sweetening power. Sucralose is 600 times sweeter than white sugar, while aspartame is 180 times sweeter.

Where does aspartame come from? It was actually discovered by coincidence in 1965 as a US scientist was researching a drug to treat ulcers. He was quite surprised to discover that the substance he was using in his work had an extremely sweet taste! The U.S. Food and Drug Administration

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wasted no time in commissioning a number of studies, which eventually led to them approving the use of aspartame for commercial purposes. The food industry quickly began using aspartame in manufacturing as a low-calorie sugar substitute to sweeten some food products. Canadians first began seeing aspartame used in foods after Health Canada authorized it over 20 years ago, in 1981, as a tabletop sweetener and food additive.

"Aspartame has probably been studied more than any other food additive," states Dr. Joe Schwarcz, Director of the McGill University Office for Chemistry and Society, and author of the book *That's the Way the Cookie Crumbles*, which devotes a full chapter to aspartame. "Over 70 million North Americans regularly consume products containing aspartame."

So don't be surprised by the number of food product ingredient panels that list this popular tabletop sweetener on grocery store shelves!

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