

THE NEXT STEP

Toward a Healthier Future

A BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE SEBASTOPOL TOXICS EDUCATION PROGRAM



Artificially Sweet

Do your New Year's resolutions include **losing weight or eating healthier**? Or do you generally **seek to avoid sugar** in your diet?

If so, **beware the seduction of synthetic artificial sweeteners (AS)**. They seem to offer us sweetness without sugar's downsides. **And they are popular**. A 2017 study found that 41% of U.S. adults and 25% of children say they eat at least one low- or no-calorie sweetener.

However, studies have linked these lab-made chemicals to headaches, migraines, weight gain, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, gut health harm, cancer, and more. They also resist wastewater treatment and can be found in surface water, drinking water, and aquifers.

There are healthier sweeteners, which I'll also discuss here. **You can see my article sources and more information at** www.healthyworld.org/sweeteners.

What's Wrong With Sugar?

Research has found that **77% of Americans are seeking less sugar in their diets**. **There are good reasons for that**. Too much sugar can harm dental health, spike blood sugar, and encourage weight gain, obesity, diabetes, heart problems, and even cancer. It can also damage collagen, which can cause wrinkles and other skin problems!

Still, the average American eats 57 pounds of sugar a year. That's about 17 teaspoons a day,

which is substantially more than the American Heart Association's advised maximum of 9 teaspoons a day for men, and 6 teaspoons for women and children over age two. It advises none for children under two. A can of soda alone can have 8 to 16 teaspoons!

We can eat sugar in soft drinks, fruit drinks, coffee, tea, cookies, cakes, pies, ice cream, and pastries. But it's also often in unexpected places, such as bread and pasta sauce!

Where Are AS Found?

We can also consume AS in a wide range of products, even where we don't suspect it. These include soda, fruit juice, jam, yogurt, salad dressings, frozen desserts, candies, baked goods, snack foods, prepared meats, cereals, gum, and breath mints. And who would expect AS in toothpaste, mouthwash, cough syrup, vitamins, pharmaceuticals, and nicotine gum?

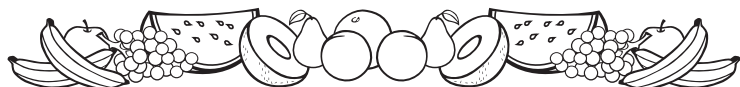
Issues With AS

The Environmental Working Group (EWG) says that years of research have raised questions about the health impacts of AS, including **links with diabetes and obesity**.

Now a study in the Sept. 2022 peer-reviewed *British Medical Journal* found AS consumption associated with a **9% higher risk of cardiovascular disease** and an **18% higher risk of cerebrovascular disease** (e.g. strokes).

Here are some **common concerns with AS**. Specifics vary by the AS, so research the ones you eat.

See *Sweetness*, over



It's Our Birthday!!

With this issue, we're celebrating **22 years of publishing *The Next STEP* (TNS)!**

Now we need your help! Please fill out the easy enclosed survey card to give us your feedback about our efforts. (This card is also in the City's online bill paying system, at the bottom of the My Bill tab.)

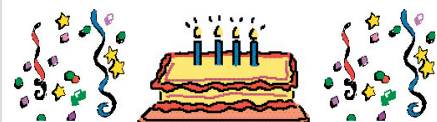
Our goal with this innovative City project is to nurture a healthier Sebastopol for everyone by reducing our exposure to toxics.

So we help folks reduce the toxics used in our homes, schools, parks, businesses, food, ecosystems, and more.

TNS is produced by a small team of local citizens, working on a volunteer basis (which keeps costs very low) because we support this goal. We're grateful to the City Council and staff for taking action for the community's best interest with this project.

Also let us know how we can best support your toxics reduction in the coming year, including any questions, tips, story ideas, or success stories.

We want to hear from you! Your support truly makes this project possible. Thank you!



Did You Know?

***The Next STEP* costs the City almost nothing.** Created entirely by volunteer efforts, and with no added postage expense, its primary cost is copying. This is literally a drop in the bucket of Sebastopol's \$25 million annual budget. Given the consistent evidence that common toxics are harming us all, this is a bargain for our shared health, now and long into the future.

Sweetness, continued

■ **Weight gain.** People often eat AS to reduce calories and lose weight. But many studies have connected them to weight *gain!* One reason could be that AS can interfere with our body's balance of insulin and glucose, so we still feel hungry.

■ **Increased diabetes risk.** One study found that daily consumption of AS drinks actually *increased* the risk of type 2 diabetes by 67%!

■ **Gut health harm.** Beneficial bacteria in our gastrointestinal tract are key to gut function and to a healthy immune system. But studies have found that AS can be toxic to digestive gut microbes, intensify gut inflammation, and could increase the risk of IBS and Crohn's Disease.

■ **Increased sweet cravings.** The high sweetness of AS keeps our bodies wanting more, and diminishes our ability to taste the natural sweetness of fruit and vegetables.

■ **And more.** Studies have linked AS consumption to depression, anxiety, mood disorders, dementia, memory loss, and liver damage.

Intermediate Options

■ **Natural sugars, such as honey, maple syrup, molasses, and agave.** While they're generally more whole foods, they're still sugars, so most will spike blood sugar and impact dental health.

■ **Fruit.** Whole fruit is better than table sugar. Still, some can spike

blood sugar, and fruit juices more so, because the fiber is removed.

Healthier Sweeteners

Naturally sourced, these don't have calories or spike blood sugar.

■ **Stevia.** Extracted from the *Stevia rebaudiana* shrub, stevia has been used for food and medicine for hundreds of years, and longer by native peoples. Rosemary's Garden has stevia plant leaves and powder.

■ **Monk fruit.** This tasty option is extracted from a small melon-like fruit grown in China for hundreds of years — yes, originally by monks!

What You Can Do

■ **Identify your desired approach to sweeteners,** based on your health needs and priorities. Years ago, I eliminated products with sugar, except sweet treats. Now I seek treats with monk fruit and stevia. Also, some experts advise against AS for pregnant women.

■ **Calculate your current sugar consumption.** Packaged products show the Added Sugars in grams. Divide that by four to get the number of teaspoons for that serving size!

■ **Read product ingredient lists to see what's really inside.**

– **Sugar and similar sweeteners can be called:** Sucrose, dextrose, corn syrup, high fructose corn syrup (HFCS), maltodextrin, coconut sugar, and concentrated fruit juice.

– **Common AS types:** **Aspartame** (aka Equal, NutraSweet); **Neotame** (aka Newtame); **Sucralose** (aka Splenda Original); **Saccharine** (aka Sweet'N Low); and **Acesulfame potassium** (aka Ace-K, Sunette).

– **Also limit sugar alcohols such as: Xylitol, erythritol, maltitol, mannitol, and sorbitol.** Too much can cause gastrointestinal bloating, gas, cramps, and diarrhea. And Xylitol is toxic to dogs.

– **Even check products touting healthier sweeteners on the**

Disclaimer: This newsletter offers summary content for informational purposes only. It is not intended as medical advice. Please do your own research on topics of interest to you, and consult with your medical professionals to make appropriate choices for your particular health situation.

Avoiding Yard & Garden Toxics

Now is a great time to tend to your outdoor spaces — **to avoid insect and disease issues later in the year — and thus avert the need to even consider toxics!** Here are some ideas.

■ **Pick up fruit under trees.** These can harbor insects or disease which can return later. For instance, apples can hide codling moth larvae (the proverbial worm in the apple). Discard these away from the trees, such as in a compost pile or green can, or fed to farm animals.

■ **Fertilize areas you plan to plant,** so it'll be settled in by spring. Consider targeting via soil testing.

■ **Plant bare root berries and trees.** These can save you money! And they'll get settled into the earth better this time of year.

■ **Consider a nontoxic dormant spray** (for instance, on fruit trees or roses) — especially if you've had prior issues with insects or disease.

Look for less-toxic options and advice at Harmony Farm Supply and Sebastopol Hardware!

front panel. They can still contain AS, sugar, and/or sugar alcohols!

■ **If you have health issues,** especially mystery ones, go without AS for 30 days to see if they improve.

■ **Look for healthier alternatives to your favorite foods.** There are many wonderful ideas online and options in stores!

■ **Find joy in food with healthy sweetness,** to nurture and assist your body's happy functioning.

ABOUT STEP

The Next STEP (TNS) is published six times a year by the **Sebastopol Toxics Education Program (STEP)**. STEP is a project of the **City of Sebastopol**, implemented by local citizen volunteers. **STEP's mission** is to support city residents in reducing their toxic use and exposure, creating a healthier and safer Sebastopol for everyone.

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Got a pest problem? Or a toxics question?

The STEP Online Index can help! It's easy to look up your topic and find our well-researched, condensed, and useful information — to help you get up-to-speed and into action. It also makes it easy to share this information! Plus you and others can get on our low-volume email list, to hear when new issues are online.

www.healthyworld.org/STEP