

## World Health Organization Warns Against Using Artificial Sweeteners

Continued consumption doesn't reduce weight and could increase the risk of Type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular diseases and mortality in adults, the W.H.O. said on Monday.

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The World Health Organization on Monday warned against using artificial sweeteners to control body weight or reduce the risk of noncommunicable diseases, saying that long-term use is not effective and could pose health risks.

These alternatives to sugar, when consumed long term, do not serve to reduce body fat in either adults or children, the W.H.O. said in a recommendation, adding that continued consumption could increase the risk of Type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular diseases and mortality in adults.

"The recommendation applies to all people except individuals with pre-existing diabetes and includes all synthetic and naturally occurring or modified nonnutritive sweeteners that are not classified as sugars found in manufactured foods and beverages, or sold on their own to be added to foods and beverages by consumers," the W.H.O. said.

The W.H.O. recommendation is based on a review of available evidence, the agency said, and is part of a set of guidelines for healthy diets being rolled out.

Some examples of the sweeteners include aspartame, saccharin, sucralose and stevia. The W.H.O.'s announcement contradicts previous studies that have said these sweeteners don't offer any health benefits but also do not cause harm.

Nutrition research is constantly evolving and findings are being updated with stronger data, said Stephanie McBurnett, a registered dietitian and nutrition educator with the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine. Examining the effects of saturated fats and other parts of people's diets may provide more insight into the overall reasons behind some health issues that have been blamed on sugar.

"It's not surprising to me that the World Health Organization didn't find really any difference in health benefits between a regular soda and a diet soda," said Ms. McBurnett, who is also a licensed dietitian and nutritionist. "They're both processed foods." She added, "If you look at what's driving these chronic diseases like heart disease, diabetes, obesity, sugar is not always the only factor."

The recommendation from the W.H.O. does not directly affect any individual country's policy. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration, for example, might take this guidance into account and institute its own concerns or tweak labeling, Ms. McBurnett said. But it is not under any obligation to do so, either.

The F.D.A. did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The International Sweeteners Association, a nonprofit organization that represents the industry, called the W.H.O.'s recommendation a disservice to consumers.

"Low/no calorie sweeteners are one of the most thoroughly researched ingredients in the world and continue to be a helpful tool to manage obesity, diabetes and dental diseases," the association said in a statement. "They offer consumers an alternative to reduce sugar and calorie intake with the sweet taste they know and expect."

The W.H.O.'s recommendation is currently considered conditional, the organization said.

"This signals that policy decisions based on this recommendation may require substantive discussion in specific country contexts, linked for example to the extent of consumption in different age groups," the statement said.

The recommendation doesn't extend as far as personal care and hygiene products that include artificial sugars such as toothpaste, skin creams and medications, the W.H.O. said. It also doesn't include low-calorie sugars and sugar alcohols, which come from sugar itself.

"People need to consider other ways to reduce free sugars intake, such as consuming food with naturally occurring sugars, like fruit, or unsweetened food and beverages," said Francesco Branca, the W.H.O. director for nutrition and food safety. He said that non-sugar sweeteners "are not essential dietary factors and have no nutritional value. People should reduce the sweetness of the diet altogether, starting early in life, to improve their health."

