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Aspartame Deemed Safe By Expert Panel

Science Daily — A sweeping review of research studies of aspartame says there is no evidence that the non-nutritive sweetener causes cancer, neurological damage or other health problems in humans.

Looking at more than 500 reports, including toxicological, clinical and epidemiological studies dating from 1970's preclinical work to the latest studies on the high-intensity sweetener, along with use levels and regulations data, an international expert panel from 10 universities and medical schools evaluated the safety of aspartame for people of all ages and with a variety of health conditions.

Their study is published in the September issue of *Critical Reviews in Toxicology*.* It was funded by Ajinomoto Company Inc., a manufacturer of aspartame.

"There have been continued questions in the media and on the internet about the safety of aspartame," said panel member and University of Maryland food and nutrition professor Bernadene Magnuson. "Our study is a very comprehensive review of all of the research that's been done on aspartame. Never before has a group with the breadth of experience of this panel looked at this question."

Aspartame

A non-nutritive sweetener, aspartame is approximately 200 times sweeter than sucrose, the accepted standard for sweetness. Though aspartame has the same number of calories as sugar on a weight-to-weight basis, it can be added to food or pharmaceuticals at a fraction of what would be needed with sucrose to achieve the same sweetness, with far fewer calories.

Aspartame was discovered by accident in 1965, and since then has become a popular sweetener in more than 6000 food and pharmaceutical products that range from soft drinks to ketchup.

Aspartame consumption

The panel used the latest data – 2001-02 -- from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Surveys (NHANES) to determine the most current levels of aspartame consumption.

"Even the very highest consumers of aspartame are well below the acceptable daily intake (ADI) and well below the amounts used in animal testing," said Magnuson.

Evaluation findings

The team reviewed studies that tested a number of health effects of varying levels of aspartame, including amounts that far exceed the acceptable daily intake, on animals and humans. In addition to healthy adults and children, studies also looked at effects on adults and children with diabetes, hyperactive and sugar-sensitive children, and people with Parkinson's disease and depression.

The Expert Panel's evaluation concluded the following:

Overall

• Aspartame is safe at current levels of consumption, which remain well below established ADI levels, even among high user sub-populations. No credible evidence was found that aspartame is carcinogenic, neurotoxic or has or any other adverse effects when consumed even at levels many times the established ADI levels.

Specifically:

- Based on results of several long term studies, aspartame does not have carcinogenic or cancer-promoting activity.
- Results of extensive investigation in studies that mimic human exposure do not show any evidence of neurological effects, such as memory and learning problems, of aspartame consumption.
- Overall the weight of the evidence indicates that aspartame has no effect on behavior, cognitive function, neural function or seizures in any of the groups studied.

- Aspartame has not been shown to have adverse effects on reproductive activity or lactation.
- Studies conclude that aspartame is safe for use by diabetics and may aid diabetics in adhering to a sugar-free diet.
- There is no evidence to support an association between aspartame consumption and obesity. On the contrary, when used in multidisciplinary weight control programs, aspartame may actually aid in long-term weight control.
- The studies provide no evidence to support an association between aspartame and brain or hematopoietic tumor development.

Panel members

In addition to Bernadene Magnuson, the Expert Panel included: George A. Burdock, the Burdock Group; John Doull, University of Kansas Medical School; Robert M. Kroes, Institute for Risk Assessment Sciences, Utrecht, The Netherlands; Gary M Marsh, University of Pittsburgh; Michael W. Pariza, University of Wisconsin; Peter S. Spencer, Oregon Health and Science University; William J. Waddell, University of Louisville Medical School; Ronald Walker, University of Surrey, Great Britain; and Gary M. Williams, New York Medical School.

"Aspartame: A Safety Evaluation Based on Current Use Levels, Regulations and Toxicological and Epidemiological Studies" was funded by unrestricted support from Ajinomoto Company, Inc. Aspartame is one of Ajinomoto's core strategic products.

Note: This story has been adapted from a news release issued by University of Maryland, College Park.

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