



# THE PLAIN DEALER

## Sweet alternatives

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### Saccharin

Brand names include: Sweet'N Low, Sugar Twin.

Brief history: Discovered in 1879, it has been in use for more than a century. It is 300 times sweeter than sugar.

Sources: It often is used in processed foods and drug items and as a tabletop sweetener.

Concerns: In the 1970s, it was shown to cause bladder cancer in rats. At the time, it was the only noncaloric alternative to sugar on the market. When the Food and Drug Administration proposed banning it, public outcry kept it on the market, with a warning label.

### Aspartame

Brand names include: Equal.

Brief history: Approved in 1981, it is 180 times sweeter than sugar. It is made from two amino acids: aspartic acid and phenylalanine.

Sources: It is used in beverages, cereals, desserts, gum and as a tabletop sweetener.

Concerns: Heat destroys it, so cannot be used in cooked foods. Because it contains phenylalanine, it should not be used by persons with phenylketonuria, or PKU.

### Sucralose

Brand names include: Splenda.

Brief history: It's 600 times sweeter than sugar. It is the only noncaloric sweetener made from sugar and passes through the body unabsorbed.

Sources: Approved in 1998 for limited use, now approved as an all-purpose sweetener for all foods. It can be used in cooking and baking.

Concerns: None cited.

### Sugar alcohols

Brand names include: sorbitol, mannitol, xylitol, others.

Brief history: These are not low-calorie sweeteners.

Sources: Such ingredients often are seen in "sugar-free" foods.

Concerns: If weight loss is your goal, be wary of these. In fact, any "sugar-free" food should be evaluated for its calorie content and compared to the standard variety.

Stevia

Brand names include: Labeling usually says "stevia."

Brief history: Comes from a South American shrub.

Sources: It can be sold as a dietary supplement, although it can't be promoted as a sweetener.

Concerns: Although it has a sweet taste, it is not FDA-approved as a food additive. It has not been evaluated for safety. Some research has linked it to an increased risk of cancer.

- Cinda Williams Chima

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