Experts Disagree About Aspartame’s “Possibly Carcinogenic” Status

Aspartame—a nonsugar sweetener found in diet beverages, chewing gum, and ice cream, among other food and drink products—is now classified as potentially cancer-causing based on a recent analysis of limited evidence from human and animal studies by the World Health Organization’s (WHO’s) International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC). The sweetener’s acceptable daily intake remains at 40 mg/kg of body weight, or the equivalent of between about 9 to 14 cans of diet soda per day for a roughly 150-lb (70 kg) adult, according to the agency’s Joint Expert Committee on Food Additives.

Because the findings are based on limited evidence, WHO experts called for more and better studies of the link between aspartame and cancer.

The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) disagreed with aspartame’s characterization, citing limitations in the studies the IARC used in its analysis and noting that regulatory agencies in other countries have evaluated aspartame and consider it safe. In addition, the FDA pointed out that some consumers might depend on aspartame or other sweeteners because they’re lower in calories than sugar and generally don’t raise blood glucose levels.

− Emily Harris

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Note: Source references are available through embedded hyperlinks in the article text online.