RUMOR: Artificial sweeteners are unsafe.

TRUTH: The Internet is flooded with rumors that artificial sweeteners (Splenda, Nutrasweet, etc) can cause ailments such as cancer, multiple sclerosis, dementia, and many others.

Sucralose (Splenda) is said to be structurally related to the pesticide DDT and causes autoimmune disease.

Tell people that this is NOT true. The only thing in common between sucralose and DDT is that they both have chlorine atoms. Chlorine is naturally found in many foods, beverages and drinking water. By adding chlorine atoms to sugar, it becomes inert and is not metabolized by the body. The chlorine in sucralose also makes it heat-stable so that it can be used in cooking and baking.

Tell people there's NO proof of serious adverse effects with sucralose.

Aspartame (Nutrasweet, Equal) is claimed to cause cancer, brain tumors, seizures, multiple sclerosis, and hair loss.

It's also rumored to cause dementia, behavioral disturbances in children, and allergic reactions.

Some say these problems occur because aspartame is metabolized to methanol and is toxic. But less methanol is produced from the metabolism of aspartame than from many fruits and veggies. The amounts produced from aspartame and fruits and vegetables are too small to cause any harm.

Tell people there's NO reliable evidence that aspartame causes any of these adverse effects.

Advise patients diagnosed with phenylketonuria (PKU) to avoid aspartame. Aspartame contains phenylalanine and patients with PKU can't get rid of it. Accumulation of phenylalanine can lead to neurological, behavioral and dermatologic problems.

Saccharin (Sweet n'Low) got a bad rap when it was found to cause bladder cancer in rats. But the dose of saccharin used in the study was the equivalent of up to 800 diet sodas a day. Tell people there's no proof that saccharin causes cancer in humans.

Acesulfame-K (Sunette) is also being attacked with claims that it can cause cancer...but this hasn't been proven either.

Tell people not to believe these rumors. While some people may experience idiosyncratic adverse effects such as headaches and insomnia, there's no proof that artificial sweeteners are harmful.

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