

Position of the New Mexico Dietetic Association: Use of Aspartame and Sugar Substitutes

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The New Mexico Dietetic Association is a state affiliate to the American Dietetic Association. Our members are trained dietetics professionals that serve the public as a credible source of food and nutrition information. It is the position of the New Mexico Dietetic Association (NMDA) that consumers can safely enjoy a range of nutritive and nonnutritive sweeteners when consumed in a diet that is guided by current federal nutrition recommendations as well as individual health goals.

This position is in response to state actions proposing to ban the low-calorie sweetener, aspartame. We are concerned that any proposal to prohibit the sale of aspartame and products containing its derivate compounds is misguided. In fact, the sweeteners components are found in much greater amounts in every day foods, ranging from juices, meats, to dairy products.

Here are the facts. Aspartame, also sold as Equal and NutraSweet, is used in over 6,000 food products and consumed by millions of Americans. Our bodies digest aspartame like any other protein. It is broken down into phenylalanine, aspartic acid, and a small amount of methanol. The amino acids are not “brain toxins,” but are building blocks of protein found naturally and consumed in much greater amounts in meat, milk, fruits and vegetables. For example, a serving of nonfat milk provides about six times more phenylalanine and 13 times more aspartic acid than an aspartame-sweetened beverage.

The 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans includes a key recommendation to “*Choose and prepare foods and beverages with little added sugars or caloric sweeteners.*” Because people have an innate preference for sweets, this can be a difficult dietary change to maintain. As a low-calorie sweetener, aspartame offers *one* strategy for lowering calories without sacrificing sweetness - a tool New Mexicans can use.

Consumers can choose from a wide range of sweeteners found in the food supply. Aspartame is one nonnutritive sweetener that individuals can safely use as part of a healthy, balanced diet to manage their weight, diabetes, dental health, and other health concerns. Allegations blaming aspartame for a number of health problems is refuted by hundreds of scientific, peer-reviewed studies demonstrating its safety. The NMDA is concerned that any decision to ban a FDA-approved low-calorie sweetener is based not on scientific evidence, but personal testimony from a few individuals.

Banning this wide-spread low-calorie sweetener would require an indescribable amount of state money, time and personnel. State resources would be better spent and New Mexicans would be better served by policy change that makes it easier to choose healthier foods in our communities and help address the serious epidemic of obesity and diabetes among children and adults. The New Mexico Dietetic Association joins other health organizations in our confidence of the scientific research on aspartame demonstrating its safety as part of an overall healthy, balanced diet.