**My choice: Natural sugar** **or alternative** **sweeteners**

As we all know sugar is known as calorie sweetener. It just provides us energy or empty calories with no nutritional value. Added sugar had been playing prominent role in increasing the occurrences of obesity, dental caries and hyperglycemia among the people for many years. With these ill effects of natural sugars, the alternative sweeteners are gaining popularity in the markets. Everyone young, old are fascinated with the term zero calories associated with any product made with any kind of sweetener. Be it a soft drink, an energy bar, or a sachet which is used to add to our cup or tea or coffee. Growing number of commercials are portraying skinny models promoting many brands of such sweeteners helping in boosting the business of the sweeteners to large extent.

**My question**: how safe these sweeteners are?

**My inferences:**

Artificial sweeteners are synthetic sugar substitutes that may be derived from naturally occurring substances, including herbs or sugar itself. They are also known as intense sweeteners because they are many times sweeter than regular sugar. Some of them available in market are sweet one, equal, splenda.

Occurrences:

Widely used in processed foods, soft drinks, powdered drink mixes, candy, canned foods, jams and jellies, dairy products and other foods and beverages.

Merits: They are attractive alternative to sugar they virtually provide no calories to diet. They do not contribute to tooth decay and cavities. Promotes weight management with no calories. They may be good alternative to manage diabetes. Unlike sugar, they generally don’t raise blood sugar levels because they are not carbohydrates.

Demerits: Most of them leave an off taste. Safe if only used in moderation. If you eat too many sugar-free foods, you can still gain weight if they have other ingredients that contain calories.

Sugar alcohols:

Occurrences: They are found in many processed foods and other products, including chocolate, candy, frozen desserts, chewing gum, toothpaste, mouthwash, baked goods and fruit spreads, usually sugar on an equal basis.

Merits: Weight control: fewer calories than sugar-2 calories per gram. Thus aid in weight-control efforts.

Diabetes: Their effect on blood sugar is less than that of regular sugars. Is effective when consumed as a total amount of carbohydrates in meals and snacks.

Demerits: Sugar alcohols have a laxative effect, causing bloating, intestinal gas and diarrhea usually consumed from 50 gms to 10 gms in a day.

Natural herbs: The herb stevia derives from a plant whose leaves have been used as sweetner is recently recognized safe.

Natural sweeteners:

Honey, date, Maple syrups, fruit juice concentrate

Natural sugar substitutes may seem healthier than processed table sugar, their vitamin and mineral content isn’t significantly different from that of sugar. Honey and sugar for instance are nutritionally similar and both end up in your body as glucose and fructose.

Demerits: Consuming natural sweeteners can lead to health problems such as tooth decay, poor nutrition and weight gain and increased triglycerides. Natural sweeteners like honey can produce botulism toxin.

**My choice**:

After making intense study of various sweetener alternatives with good old sugar. My choice is always the added sugar.(within the recommended amounts), to my cup of coffee twice a day, sweets, sweetened beverages and other processed foods made with real sugar on an occasional day won’t harm me in any way.

(USDA food guide says up to 8 tsp. sugar for 2,000k.cal diet with nutrient dense food choice and fat less or equal to 30%)

Reason 1. I hate the off taste of artificial sweeteners added to my cup of coffee. Sugar alcohols or natural sweeteners though sweeter will have the same ill effects as of added sugars when consumed in excess. I might like the processed foods like cake or sweets make from artificial sweeteners but it may add up calories with other ingredients in it. Foods made from artificial sweeteners have proven to provide more cravings and causing more weight gain.

Reason 2: Recommended amounts of added sugar have not proven any harmful effect on causing dental caries, if I consume sweets or cakes very moderately and forgo my candies and toffees with a balanced diet. I won’t have get my cavities filled too often and need not see my weighing scale every day.

Reason 3: I need not have to worry about any side-effects or health problems related to artificial sweeteners. Moderation is a key even for all the sweeteners to avoid side effects and get best results.

Reason 4: I am a non-diabetic, woman of normal weight with normal blood levels of lipids, glucose and cholesterol. I do not have to worry about hypo-hyperglycemic indexes with my sugar intake.

Over all my choice is always and any time added sugar. But sweeteners and sugar need to be consumed in moderation. If I should choose one of them then I would say sugar is my personal favorite.

**My References**:

Huff post healthy living: sugar or sweetener? Your body knows what’s right. Susan Dopart MS, RD author.

Mayohealth clinic website and text book.