

ARTIFICIAL SWEETENERS

A recent article in the New York Times based on the research of Dr. Erin Elivar from Israel supports the thesis that the use of artificial sweeteners may actually increase obesity, the metabolic syndrome, and diabetes. Most physicians who do any kind of weight loss counseling have long noticed that those patients who drink diet soda, use saccharin or aspartame in their coffee, etc. seem to be the heaviest. One could argue that because these patients are obese to start with they have tried to lose weight by using no calorie artificial sweeteners. I have counseled my patients that these sweeteners, while empty of calories, are six hundred times sweeter than sugar and therefore dull the sense of sweetness and actually lend to cravings for sugar. There is no question that when one drinks a diet soda, for example, about an hour later there is craving for more sugar and a general sleepiness is felt. A little basic physiology is in order to understand this. At the most basic level diabetes is a disease characterized by the inability of the organism to transfer sugar from the blood to the organs and/or be stored in the liver. Insulin, produced in the pancreas, is the hormone that allows this to happen. Diabetes type 1 is generally inherited, diagnosed in childhood or early teens and is treated with a vast array of drugs to keep the sugar level manageable. Well known are the side effects of diabetes left untreated or poorly controlled: blindness, kidney failure, and most importantly vascular disease. The vascular disease is caused by the elevation of triglycerides that is necessary to transport the sugar molecules. These triglycerides cause plaques in the arteries that eventually cause blockage that can lead to heart attack and stroke. Diabetes type 2 is generally acquired by consuming too much sugar causing glucose intolerance and actually not having enough natural insulin. People who are obese, have poor diets, smoke and have high blood pressure are at risk for the Metabolic Syndrome that is characterized by obesity, elevated glucose, high triglycerides and almost certainly will develop vascular disease. Now back to the premise of this article. Dr. Elivar's research suggests that artificial sweeteners cause a change in the microorganisms in the bowel and glucose intolerance is increased thereby worsening the metabolic syndrome with subsequent increased risk of diabetes and all its complications. So, what physicians have intuitively suspected seems to be borne out by this research: **ARTIFICIAL SWEETENERS ACTUALLY INCREASE OBESITY AND RAISE THE RISK OF DIABETES.** Americans seem to be hooked on all sorts of artificially sweetened beverages and it is their choice to consume them. A prescription for health would include avoidance of all these sweeteners, sugar in moderation and a diet that is high in protein, low in carbohydrates and of moderate caloric intake (1800 calories for adults), alcohol in moderation and, of course, smoking cessation. What better way to be empowered than to take control of your own health.