

Natural Sweeteners: Which One Should You Take?

There are many natural sweeteners to choose from if you want to avoid sugar, but don't want any of the artificial sweeteners over which there are a few questions. You can choose from xylitol, Luo Han Guo, stevia and others, but before discussing these, let's have a look at the problems with sugar, artificial sweeteners and the American sugar industry.

Sugar as most people know it originates either from sugar cane or sugar beet, though by far the biggest American industry is in the cane. There are many different types of sugar, though that obtainable from cane sugar is sucrose. Sucrose is a disaccharide and carbohydrate, stored by plants as a reserve energy source to be used when needed. Humans cannot directly use sucrose, and it is metabolized in the body to glucose which needs the hormone insulin to help convert it into energy.

Insulin is produced in the pancreas, and a lack of it, or the body's failure to use it properly, is referred to as diabetes. There are two types of diabetes:

Type 1: A total lack or deficiency of insulin due to the pancreas producing insufficient quantities of insulin, or even none at all. This is often seen in young people and is generally caused by the immune system attacking the insulin-producing cells in the pancreas. The treatment for type 1 diabetes is to introduce insulin to the blood, normally by means of injections, plenty exercise and the adoption of a high carbohydrate low fat diet.

Type 2: This is strongly associated with obesity and weight, and is due either to insufficient insulin production by the pancreas (but not as deficient as for Type 1 diabetes) or an inability of the cells of the body to properly use insulin. Type 2 diabetes does not always require insulin injections, and can be treated by exercise, diet and weight control. However, there are occasions where insulin injections are also required. It tends to affect people older than those with Type 1 diabetes and 90% of cases are of this type.

Both types, however, are connected with an excess of glucose in the blood, into which most sugars are converted. A diet low in sucrose will go a long way towards helping people that suffer from either type of diabetes, and control of carbohydrate intake should include a reduction in the intake of sucrose in the form of beet or cane sugar. This accepted, then if you need a sweetener, a saccharide free natural sweetener would appear to be the logical choice.

You could opt for a synthetic sweetener, but they also have their problems. There is evidence that saccharin could be a carcinogen, and 'aspartame' disease is not a myth. The other artificial sweeteners also have sufficient questions that natural sweeteners would appear to be the obvious choice. But which? That is the question. Let's have a look at some and check out their pros and cons.

The first is Stevia. This is a South American herb that is 400 times sweeter than sucrose and yet is very low in calories and does not affect diabetics. Used throughout most of the world, it has not been approved by the FDA as a food additive due mainly, it would appear, to lobbying by the American sugar corporations. This is understandable, since mass substitution of sugar by stevia in processed foods is entirely possible, but would cost the sugar corporations billions.

However, it is available to purchase from health food stores, and does not appear to possess the problems that aspartame does. Unlike that sweetener, it can be used in baking and cooking, and is ideal for diabetics and people suffering from yeast infections such as candida. Such infections are aggravated by sugar in the colon, since yeasts love sugar, but they cannot survive on stevia. The safety of stevia has been proven through hundreds of years of popular use without any problems.

However, there are others. Luo Han Guo is a sweet Chinese fruit of which extracts are marketed as a natural sweetener. The plant it comes from is the *Momordica grosvenori*, a member of the cucumber squash family that grows in the mountainous areas of southern China. The sweeteners it contains are called mogrosides that are terpene glycosides, of which there are five different forms, the main one being termed mogroside-5.

The extract is available in the form of a powder consisting of around 80% mogrosides, and possesses around 250% of the sweetness of sucrose. This, too, can be used in cooking; because it is stable to heat and contains about 2% of the calories of ordinary sugar (one half teaspoon is equivalent to 25 teaspoons sugar). You can help 50 medicines go down for the same calories of getting one down using sugar!

Not only that but, like stevia, there are no known side effects. It has been used for many centuries in Chinese medicine in the treatment of gastrointestinal conditions and conditions of the respiratory tract. Unlike natural sweeteners, Luo Han Guo has been found to be useful in helping to manage diabetes since it does not cause insulin levels to rise and are not involved in energy production, so have no effect on your weight. The mogrosides from Luo Han Guo are also under study as inhibitors of certain tumors, and might be able to inhibit skin tumor growth. Other possible medical advantages include helping to reduce atherosclerosis and heart disease, so would appear to be a useful sweetener to use in your coffee!

Finally, xylitol. It was during World War II that Finnish scientists rediscovered xylitol that had been previously used in Germany as a sweetener in the late nineteenth century. The sugar shortage resurrected this substance that can metabolize without the need for insulin.

Xylitol is a substance that is found in some fruits and vegetables and also in corn cobs. In fact, it is a product that appears in animal metabolism, and so is perfectly safe. It is known to help support the immune system, and to help reduce the effects of aging. It possesses antibacterial properties due to its 5-carbon ring and has been approved by the FDA. Xylitol can replace sugar in most of its domestic uses, including in baking and as a natural sweetener. It is also used extensively in chewing gum as a sweetener that does not cause dental cavities due the acid caused by bacterial attack on the sugar.

However, one use to which xylitol cannot be put, nor any of the other natural sweeteners mentioned here, is in fermentation. Try these for your wine or beer and you will be very disappointed at the low alcohol level of your brew! This is also, however, one of the benefits of xylitol: it cannot feed the yeasts that cause candida or any other yeast infection. Although it is a saccharide, it is the same as the others in this respect.

So, which of these natural sweeteners should you take? The choice is yours since each has its own benefits with very few disadvantages and certainly no recorded side effects that we know of. Use stevia for superior sweetening effects, and make up a concentrated solution of it in water for your cooking. Use luo han if you have gastrointestinal problems, and use xylitol if you want fresher breath and to protect your teeth.

Use none for brewing or winemaking, and use any of them if you are diabetic. The choice is yours. These sweeteners are available at your local or internet health food store.

About the Author

More information on [natural sweeteners](#) can be found at VitaNet, LLC Health Food Store. <http://vitanetonline.com/>

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