

Diet Coke has been linked to serious cardiac damage

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Industry Buzz

- "Don't let artificial sweeteners sneak into everything you eat... The less you rely on added sweetness—artificial or natural—the better your taste buds (and heart) will feel." — [Lisa Jones, RDN, LDN, FAND](#), registered dietitian in Philadelphia

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A popular artificial sweetener could have not-so-sweet side effects on heart health, according to a new study. The study, which was conducted by a team of Swedish researchers and published in the journal *Cell Metabolism*, focused on (the Diet Coke-lover's favorite) aspartame.^[1]

To conduct the study, done in mice, the researchers fed the mice food that contained 0.15% aspartame every day for 12 weeks. This would equate to consuming about three cans of diet soda a day for a human.^[2]

The study found that aspartame triggered increased insulin levels in the mice, contributing to a buildup of fatty plaque in the arteries.

Atherosclerosis and high inflammation levels are known to increase the risk for heart attack and stroke over time. The study researchers said they plan to verify their findings in humans and explore the "long-term health impact" of consuming artificial sweeteners.^[2]

About the controversy

Aspartame's potential health risks have been a controversial topic among health agencies. The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) issued a conclusion on aspartame, classifying aspartame as "possibly carcinogenic to humans," which is shared by the WHO. The FDA, however, has stated that they disagree with this classification, and maintain that aspartame can be a useful tool in helping people reduce sugar consumption when consumed within Acceptable Daily Intake (ADI) limits.^[3]

Related: [Popular artificial sweetener aspartame labeled as a possible carcinogen by the WHO](#)

With so many artificial sweeteners out there, it can be difficult to tell with certainty what impacts they may have on people's health.

In her work in the realm of health and nutrition, [Lisa Jones, RDN, LDN, FAND](#), a registered dietitian based in Philadelphia, PA, says these discussions often come down to "balance and the bigger picture."

"One diet soda won't break your heart, but relying on artificial sweeteners instead of real, whole foods isn't doing your health any favors," Jones says. "I help patients weigh the risks, read labels, and make choices that work for their long-term well-being."

In the clinic

To help patients set realistic health goals and expectations regarding their sweetener intake, she recommends using artificial sweeteners sparingly, but "not as a crutch."

"If an occasional diet soda helps you cut back on sugar, fine," Jones says. "Don't let artificial sweeteners sneak into everything you eat. The goal should be to retrain your taste buds to enjoy less sweetness overall."

As kinder alternatives to the body, she encourages use of fruit-infused water, or finding natural ways to add flavor to a hot beverage such as including cinnamon or vanilla.

Even better, she suggests that people “choose whole foods that don’t rely on sugar or sweeteners in the first place.”

“The less you rely on added sweetness—artificial or natural—the better your taste buds (and heart!) will feel,” Jones says.