

# Calorie Control

C O M M E N T A R Y

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## Experts Denounce Aspartame Misinformation Circulating on the Internet

**"D**on't believe the rumors -- widely spread on the Internet -- that aspartame ... causes not only multiple sclerosis, but also lupus, Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease, diabetes, Gulf War syndrome, and brain tumors." -- April 1999 University of California, Berkeley Wellness Letter.

The Berkeley Wellness Letter is the latest media source to issue a salvo against misinformation about aspartame circulating on the Internet.

"Like other recent Internet-based health 'alerts,' this one is designed to scare the pants off you -- Internet terrorism," the front page article notes, adding that the document circulated via e-mail by an unidentified source is "packed with gobbledygook, strange anecdotes, misused jargon, mysterious doctors selling quack theories, and impressive-sounding organizations that may or may not exist."

The article pointed out that reputable multiple sclerosis organizations and other health/medical organizations have denounced the rumors, and that "aspartame has been more intensively studied than almost any other food additive." It also noted that leading authorities, such as the Food and Drug



Administration, American Medical Association and the World Health Organization, have concluded that aspartame is safe. The American Diabetes Association also recently issued a position statement proclaiming the safety of aspartame.

Specifically, an FDA statement noted that "aspartame is one of the most thoroughly tested food additives ever submitted to the FDA," and in conclusion, "All of the early testing...reinforced the appropriateness of FDA's approval and regulation" (continued on page 6)

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## More Good News for Olestra

Two recent studies add to the growing body of evidence that olestra chips do not cause stomach problems.

Researchers from the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, reporting their results in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*, found there were no significant differences by age or sex in the number of days volunteers who ate olestra chips reported any type of digestive effect compared to those who ate regular chips.

Dr. Robert Sandler, a professor of medicine at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill School of Medicine, conducted the study of 3,200 people for six weeks. The findings were consistent with other studies and "...do not substantiate anecdotal reports of severe diarrhea and abdominal pain or cramping associated with olestra," the authors reported. Also, "...they show that under ordinary snacking conditions, gastrointestinal symptoms among participants who eat snacks containing olestra are no more troublesome than those associated with consumption of regular snacks containing triglycerides."

That study followed research published last year in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* that concluded snack foods made with olestra were no more likely to cause gastrointestinal effects than regular chips.

In other olestra news, the manufacturer, Procter & Gamble Co., has filed a petition with the FDA requesting approval for olestra's use in place of fats and oils in microwave popcorn. The January 1996 approval of olestra included ready-to-eat popcorn, but not prepackaged, microwave popcorn. To support the amendment, Procter & Gamble provided FDA with research demonstrating olestra's safety for use in microwave popcorn. Fat-soluble vitamins will

be added to microwave popcorn made with olestra at the levels specified by the current regulations, so there will be no nutritionally significant impact on people's vitamin status from eating olestra microwave popcorn.

Olestra snacks (e.g., Pringles, Lays, Ruffles, Doritos, Tostitos) have been available in the marketplace nationally since spring 1998. Test markets for General Mills (Bugles) and Procter & Gamble (Eagle) snacks began in the summer of 1998, and in early 1999, Utz (one of the largest regional snack manufacturers) began test marketing their olestra-containing potato chips. Over 1.5 billion servings of olestra snacks have been consumed to date. Frito-Lay's Wow! chips recorded \$347 million in sales last year, making them the best-selling new product in the U.S., according to *New Product News*.

Post-marketing surveillance data show that: people typically incorporate olestra snacks responsibly into their diets (median consumption is about one ounce of chips per month); people who eat savory snacks made with olestra are not eating more savory snacks overall; and people are not using these snacks to replace fruits and vegetables as snacks. Calls for information, compliments and product comments have outweighed calls about alleged health effects by roughly 9 to 1, according to Procter & Gamble. The health effect complaint rate -- these complaints are primarily digestive effects that people attribute to the snacks -- has continued to fall, and by the last quarter of 1998, was less than 1 per 200,000 servings.

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Robert S. Sandler, et al., "Gastrointestinal Symptoms in 3181 Volunteers Ingesting Snack Foods Containing Olestra or Triglycerides," *Annals of Internal Medicine*, pp. 253-261, February 16, 1999.  
Lawrence J. Cheskin, et al., "Gastrointestinal Symptoms Following Consumption of Olestra or Regular Triglyceride Potato Chips," *Journal of the American Medical Association*, pp. 150-152, January 14, 1998.

## American Dental Association Endorses Sugar-Free Foods

The American Dental Association (ADA) recently adopted a position recognizing the role of sugar-free foods in maintaining good dental health.

The conclusion: "[ADA] strongly recommends that major efforts be made to promote the use of sugar-free foods or chewing substances in place of sugar



containing foods that involve a frequent intake or repeated oral use... use of these sugar-free foods will contribute to improved oral health."

This ADA action provides further support for the U.S. Food and Drug Administration approved health claim, "does not promote tooth decay," permitted for sugar-free products containing polyols (i.e., sugar alcohols).

## Low-Calorie/Low-Fat Bulletin

### LOW-FAT FOODS HELP CONSUMERS FOLLOW A HEALTHY DIET

People who regularly consume skim milk, lean meats or "fat-modified" products tend also to make other food choices that result in a more healthful diet than people who don't follow those three "fat-reduction



strategies," according to researchers at the University of Nevada and Pennsylvania State University, reporting in the February *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*. The researchers also found that mixing strategies is better than following just one. From a national survey of 4,000 men and women, the researchers found drinking skim

milk "is associated with an improved intake of many micronutrients," but those who relied solely on fat-modified products tended to consume inadequate levels of vitamin E.

"Mixed users" -- defined as those who used two or three of the "strategies" -- "consistently had the most favorable micronutrient profile," the researchers wrote. They concluded that people who rely on just one method of reducing dietary fat "would benefit from an understanding of how to balance their food choices."

### AMERICA'S HEALTH REPORT CARD 1998: POOR!

While most Americans are aware of the need for good healthcare, they lack discipline in their daily approach to healthy living and are overweight, stressed out, and still caught up in bad habits, according to an American Medical Association-commissioned Gallup poll of over 3,000 Americans, released late last year. "For the first time in history, a majority of Americans are dying not from unconquered diseases, but from self-inflicted problems, such as smoking, alcohol abuse, lack of exercise and the use of illegal drugs and poor diet," according to George Gallup, Jr., co-chair of the Gallup Organization.



Among the survey's findings was that one in two Americans age 12 and older are overweight. The study also found many people have shown concern about blood cholesterol levels, and in the last two years, one in four have made efforts to change their diets to lower cholesterol

levels. While there is room for improvement, according to Dr. Randolph Smoak, Jr., chairman of the AMA, increased media attention to healthy lifestyles and medical care are major reasons there is more awareness of healthcare needs.

### LOW-CALORIE DIETS SLOW CANCER

Calorie-restricted diets may slow the growth of prostate tumors, according to a rat study reported in the March 17 issue of the *Journal of the National Cancer Institute*.

"Restriction of energy intake can significantly inhibit tumor growth," researchers wrote. Because men from affluent, developed nations have higher rates of prostate cancer than men from poorer countries, researchers speculate that high-fat, high-calorie Western diets may play a role in the development of prostate cancer, which kills almost 42,000 American men each year. Researchers report that low-energy diets may slow tumor growth by inhibiting the production of two hormones associated with blood vessel growth.

In a related editorial, Dr. Alice Whittemore of Stanford University School of Medicine and colleagues note that "severe energy restriction" in the rat study may not be good for humans. They recommend further research of the mechanisms linking dietary energy and prostate cancer.



### SACCHARIN CELEBRATES ITS 120TH ANNIVERSARY

In February, saccharin celebrated its 120th anniversary. Discovered in 1879, saccharin is the world's oldest low-calorie sweetener and has been used in foods and beverages for over 90 years.

### PEOPLE READING FOOD LABELS CONSUME LESS FAT

Researchers at Seattle's Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center found that consumers who read nutrition labels get about 30 percent of their calories from fat, while nonreaders get 35 percent.

The study, published in the January *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, randomly surveyed 1,450 adults in Washington State in 1995 and 1996. Of the 80 percent who said they read labels, women who attended college or were under the age of 35 read labels the most. "The difference in fat intake between label readers and non-readers was evident even after adjusting for age, weight, sex, education, exercise and attitudes about diet," said researcher Marian Neuhouser. The study was funded by the National Cancer Institute.

Even moderate exercise helps lower heart-attack risk

## Attention Couch Potatoes: It's Never Too Late to Exercise, Researchers Advise

**R**ecent studies have shown that regular, low-intensity exercise, such as walking and gardening, may help lower heart attack risk.

In the most recent study, researchers found that walkers can reduce their risk for a first heart attack by 73 percent and those who garden can reduce their risk by 66 percent, compared to those who don't exercise, according to a report in the *Archives of Internal Medicine*.

"When performed for more than 60 minutes a week, walking for exercise or gardening was associated with a similar risk reduction to that of high-intensity leisure-time physical activity," noted Dr. Rozenn N. Lemaitre and colleagues at the University of Washington in Seattle and the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor.

The findings support current exercise recommendations from the American Heart Association, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the American College of Sports Medicine, for at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity on most days. Researchers compared data from 333 heart attack patients ages 25 to 74 years old with 503 randomly selected patients the same age who had not had a heart attack.

In other recent exercise studies, teenage girls who were encouraged to eat better, watch less TV and exercise more, lost weight, according to a report published in the *Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine*.

Dr. Steven Gortmaker of the Harvard School of Public Health and other researchers studied 641 sixth- and seventh-grade students for two years. Students took a class on health behavior, which encouraged limiting high-fat foods, watching less than 2 hours of TV daily and more physical activity. Obesity decreased from 23.6 percent to 20.3 percent in girls in the program, compared to an increase from 21.5 percent to 23.7 percent in girls not in the program.

Another study published in a recent issue of the *British Journal of Sports Medicine* reported that regular exercise pro-

motes better balance and less falling in the elderly. Falling, which is caused by poor balance, is a major cause of death in the elderly, according to researchers. Researchers, led by professor Philippe Perrin of the University Henri Poincare in Villers-les-Nancy, France, looked at 65 men and

women over 60 years old and found there was little difference between those adults who started exercising after retirement and those who never stopped. Researchers concluded that it is never too late to start exercising and improve balance.

In related news, the National Coalition for Promoting Physical Activity (NCPA) conducted the first national public awareness survey since the Surgeon General's Report (SGR) on Physical Activity and Health,

released in 1996. The survey found that more than 67 percent of Americans had no knowledge of the report and out of the 33 percent of those who did, 30 percent exercised regularly. "To have a positive impact on this nation's health, it is critical to get Americans more active, more often," stressed Steven N. Blair, senior scientific editor of the SGR. More than 250,000 deaths annually are attributed to sedentary lifestyles and could be avoided with exercise, added NCPA Executive Director James R. Whitehead.

#### References:

Rozenn N. Lemaitre, et al., "Leisure-Time Physical Activity and the Risk of Primary Cardiac Arrest," *Archives of Internal Medicine*, pp. 686-690, April 12, 1999.

Steven L. Gortmaker, et al., "Reducing Obesity via a School-Based Interdisciplinary Intervention Among Youth," *Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine*, pp. 409-418, April 1999.

Philippe P. Perrin, et al., "Effects of physical and sporting activities on balance control in elderly people," *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, pp. 121-126, April 1999.



**"When performed for more than 60 minutes a week, walking for exercise or gardening was associated with a similar risk reduction to that of high-intensity leisure-time physical activity."**



## Recommendation to Delist Saccharin May Come this Summer

**D**r. Kenneth Olden, director of the National Toxicology Program (NTP), is expected to make a recommendation this summer on whether saccharin should be delisted from the NTP's Ninth Report on Carcinogens. The recommendation will be made to Secretary of Health and Human Services Donna Shalala, who must make a final determination before the report is sent to Congress.

Last December, NTP's Executive Committee recommended by a 6 to 3 vote removing saccharin from NTP's list of suspected carcinogens. *The New York Times* covered the story on December 19 with the headline "Sweetener is Safe, Government Panel Says." NTP did not plan to publicize the results of the Executive Committee's deliberation, but after the *Times'* story was published, other media followed with their reports.

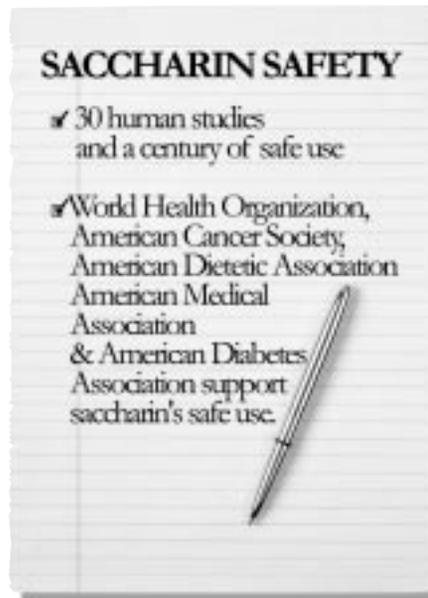
Three other NTP Committees have reviewed saccharin studies prior to the Executive Committee's action; two of the committees voted to delist saccharin, the third voted 4-3 against delisting. NTP is reviewing saccharin

under its new criteria which allow for the consideration of mechanistic data.

According to saccharin researcher Dr. Samuel Cohen, professor and chairman of the Department of Pathology and Microbiology at the University of Nebraska Medical Center, the feeding of high doses of a sodium salt, including sodium saccharin, to male rats alters the rat urine and leads to the formation of a precipitate which, in turn, leads to the formation of rat bladder tumors. These sodium salts produce tumors only when administered at high doses and only in rats.

Two working groups of the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) have recently agreed that the bladder tumors observed in male rats fed high doses of sodium saccharin are not relevant to man. IARC, too, considered mechanistic data in its evaluation of saccharin.

The International Agency for Research on Cancer also downgraded its overall rating on saccharin evidence from "possibly carcinogenic to humans" in 1987 to "not classifiable as to its carcinogenicity to humans" in 1998. Mechanistic data were considered for IARC's evaluation. ■■■



## Happy Birthday Sucralose!

**S**ucralose celebrated its first birthday April 1 at the Tavern on the Green in New York City, with a 1,000 pound chocolate layer-cake made with SPLENDA® brand sweetener. Sucralose was approved by the Food and Drug Administration on April 1, 1998. More than 100 studies were conducted over a period of 20 years to support the safety of sucralose. Sucralose, which is



made from sugar, is approved in 15 food and beverage categories, including baked goods, desserts, beverages (including soft drinks), chewing gum and fruit and dairy products.

Manufacturer McNeil Specialty Products Company announced that SPLENDA® is now available on a limited basis for people with diabetes, exclusively via the Internet at [www.lifescan.com](http://www.lifescan.com) (just click on "What's New"). It comes in single-serve packets and a granular form that measures and pours just like sugar. According to the manufacturer, full supermarket distribution is expected within 18 months. ■■■

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## Misinformation Circulating on the Internet

(continued from page 1)

of aspartame as a safe food additive."

In response to allegations about multiple sclerosis, David Squillacote, MD, senior medical advisor for the Multiple Sclerosis Foundation, stated, "I have no problem with information dissemination, even when it is wrong, but [this] has crossed the line."

Dr. Squillacote stated further, "There is no evidence that aspartame in any way causes, provokes, mimics or worsens MS. This series of allegations are almost totally without foundation. They are rabidly inaccurate and scandalously misinformative."

The American Diabetes Association's statement, issued February 9, states: "There continues to be unsubstantiated claims that the nonnutritive sweetener aspartame (brand name NutraSweet) poses health risks to people with diabetes. Aspartame has been approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), a governmental agency that conducts thorough scientific reviews to determine foods that are safe for public consumption. The American Diabetes Association follows FDA recommendations and recognizes that there is no credible scientific evidence linking aspartame to any health-related problems for people with diabetes."

A January 29 Associated Press wire story, "Debunking Internet Health Alarms," detailed some of the fall-out from the Internet e-mail campaign attacking aspartame, noting it was "spreading fear fast." The AP story quot-

ed FDA extensively and noted that "MS and lupus have been around a lot longer than aspartame has, and repeated scientific studies have found no connection between the sweetener and such symptoms."

The Calorie Control Council's Web site -- [www.caloriecontrol.org](http://www.caloriecontrol.org) (under "Other Great Sources") -- includes links to Dr. Squillacote's response, the Food and Drug Administration's comments regarding aspartame misinformation and the American Diabetes Association statement on aspartame.

Aspartame is not the only electronic health scare being perpetuated without scientific basis on the Internet. Rumors are being spread about a common shampoo ingredient that causes cancer, new "proof" that oysters are an aphrodisiac, even a certain fast-food taco containing roach eggs instead of ground beef -- just to name a few. To separate fact from fiction and head off a web of confusion, refer to reliable health sites, such as [www.healthfinder.gov](http://www.healthfinder.gov) (U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services), [www.eatright.org](http://www.eatright.org) (American Dietetic Association), [www.diabetes.org](http://www.diabetes.org) (American Diabetes Association), [www.ama-assn.org](http://www.ama-assn.org) (American Medical Association), and [www.mayoclinic.org](http://www.mayoclinic.org) (the Mayo Clinic).

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# Calorie Control

## COMMENTARY

Providing timely information on low-calorie and reduced-fat foods and beverages, weight management, physical activity and healthy eating.

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5775 Peachtree-Dunwoody Road,  
Suite 500-G, Atlanta, Georgia 30342.

Phone: (404) 252-3663. E-mail: [ccc@assnhq.com](mailto:ccc@assnhq.com).

Internet: [www.caloriecontrol.org](http://www.caloriecontrol.org).

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