Artificial Sweeteners May Cause Glucose Intolerance

September 18, 2014

Do you use Sweet'N Low, Splenda or Equal to cut back on calories and avoid unnecessary sugar in your diet? Well, new research published in the journal Nature is suggesting that fake sweeteners might actually affect gut bacteria and trigger high blood sugar levels in some people, possibly hurting—not helping—those looking to combat health issues such as obesity and diabetes, The Washington Post reports.

In the study, researchers at the Weizmann Institute in Israel initially found that consuming saccharin (the ingredient used in Sweet'N Low), sucralose (Splenda) and aspartame (Equal) dramatically increased rodent test subjects' risk of becoming glucose intolerant, a condition that can lead to type 2 diabetes.

Next, the same scientists fed seven human volunteers with regular doses of saccharin over the course of one week to evaluate the effects of the sweetener. By the end of the trial, four of these subjects ended up developing glucose intolerance. Then, in a separate project, the researchers checked the gut bacteria of nearly 400 people. Scientists discovered that those who used artificial sweeteners had noticeably different bacteria in their gut when compared with those who didn't use the fake sweets.

"This huge and poorly understood microbial world…has been shown to play a fundamental role in many aspects of our physiology, as well as in susceptibility to common human diseases," said Eran Elinav, MD, an immunologist at the Weizmann Institute and one of the study's co-authors.

In addition, researchers warned that the debate over artificial sweeteners is far from over. Nor is it just beginning. Some past studies showed that the products posted no health risks, while other findings suggested the fake sweets may actually contribute to sugar cravings and overeating among humans. Click here for more information.

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