

## Episode 05: The Worst Sweeteners (Show Notes)

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**Dr. Kristen Halland::** Hi everyone, I'm here on today's episode with Madeleine Schaufel, our integrative registered dietitian nutritionist and today's topic is about Artificial Sweeteners. Now Artificial Sweeteners have come under fire in the media before but there was a brand new study that suggested that the consumption of Artificial Sweeteners will increase your risk of Stroke and Dementia and this was one of the first times that that correlation has directly been made in the research. More specifically, the researchers claim that drinking one can of soda per day will increase your risk by 3times for Stroke and Dementia. And specifically, they were talking about Ischemic Stroke which is the type of stroke caused by a Blood clot that reduces the Oxygen and blood coming into the brain. And this just came out in Stroke which is a journal, part of the American Heart Association. But what I'd really like to talk to Madelaine about today is, what does that actually mean for you on a daily basis and how can we sort through the confusion of Artificial Sweeteners?

**Madelaine Schaufel:** Yeah, this is such a great topic and yeah, very relevant, it's a question we get at the office all the time. But, you know, before we begin this chat, I wanted to remind you that really anything that's sweet and we're going to go through a couple different sweeteners and how I would categorize everything from 'most optimal' to really 'non-optimal' sweetener choices. It's really just you need to remember that any sweet thing should be viewed as a treat and consumed with wisdom and moderation, even some of the healthiest sweeteners as we're going to talk about. So, here's how I would categorize with the best options at the top and the most harmful or least desirable options at the bottom. So, the first category is 'Safe No Calorie Alternative Sweeteners' and this is not the same thing as Artificial Sweeteners; in this category, I would put **Stevia** extract and **Lo Han Guo** or also known as **Monk-fruit** extract. So, that's **Stevia** and **Monk-fruit**, extract, these will not raise your blood sugar but it is still important to use these in moderation, you can't overdo it because they still register a sweet to the brain and I've seen first-hand in clients that they still do or can have an impact on sweet cravings.

The next category I would look at would be 'Whole Foods sweeteners' and this would be something like a dried fruit puree. For example, you can rehydrate dates with hot water or apricots and then puree in a blender and then you have a nutritious sweetener. Again, we do want to use this sparingly because unlike **Stevia**, this will definitely raise your blood sugar. Dates or Apricots, really any dried fruit is going to be very sugary but the benefits of this sweetener choice would be that it's really not processed and there's some vitamins and minerals found in dried fruits, for example, dried Apricots are a really great source of Potassium. But again, really keeping that moderate I'm thinking, a teaspoon or two amounts at a time per serving.

The next category I would say is, see we're moving down the list a little bit, the next category I'd say is okay to use occasionally or in small teaspoon kind of sized amounts, I would put pure maple syrup (not like pancake syrup, but *pure* maple syrup, it should be the real deal) and raw honey or organic Blackstrap Molasses. These definitely still have a blood sugar raising effect so, please pay attention we all need to be conscious of maintaining a healthy blood sugar; not just for our diabetic listeners out there. So, yes, still

has a blood sugar raising effect but, for example, Blackstrap Molasses is really high in minerals like iron. So again, it's ok occasionally but be thinking teaspoon amounts.

So, the next category, we're kind of continuing to move down the list, now we're moving into kind of more controversial territory. So, I would put Turbino sugar or raw sugar in kind of the more controversial territory because it's definitely still sugar and it is still somewhat processed I would also include Agave Nectar in this category because it has such high fructose content and there's some argument that that may not be great for us metabolically, you know, I'm sure a lot of listeners have heard about kind of the deal with high fructose corn syrup and how that just really wreaks havoc on our health.

**Dr. Kristen Halland:** And I love that you mentioned Agave because I think that was initially marketed as something that was healthy, initially when it came out.

**Madelaine Schaufel:** I think there were some good points made but I think we definitely still have to look at it as sugar. And then the next kind of, we're still in this kind of more controversial middle ground category, and I would put sugar alcohols in this category as well such as **Xylitol**, **Sorbitol** and **Erythritol**. They do appear to have pretty good safety data but are still a process product and in some people, they can cause **G.I.** distress if too much is consumed.

**Dr. Kristen Halland::** Can I interrupt and ask you a question? Do you have any suggestions for top products that you'd see in the grocery store where you'd find sugar alcohols; Xylitol, Sorbitol and Erythritol?

**Madelaine Schaufel:** Certainly, very commonly found in toothpaste and gums, I mean and then also just in sugar-free products in general.

**Dr. Kristen Halland:** With a sugar-free label?

**Madelaine Schaufel:** Mhm.

**Dr. Kristen Halland:** That is very sneaky.

**Madelaine Schaufel:** Yes, and then kind of a random note; if you have dogs do not let your dog consume **Xylitol**, it is really toxic to them. So, now we're moving into the kind of the Red-Light category, so we're kind of talking about 'Yellow Light Sweeteners'. So, 'Red Light' or 'completely avoid': white sugar would be in this category, high Fructose **corn syrup** and then the infamous Artificial Sweeteners that Dr. Kristen talked about in that study and some of the names that these go by are **Aspartame**, **Acesulfame K**, **Neotame**, **Sucralose**, **Saccharin**, and people know them by their brand names a little bit better, normally, this would include **Equal**, **Splenda**, and **Sweet'n'Low**. It's those pink and blue packets, they are kind of everywhere. Common products include Crystal Light, sugar and really anything marked sugar-free is very likely to have one of these sweeteners on it with a few exceptions; let's see, canned fruit, yogurts, syrups, jellies, coffee creamer, some toothpaste definitely have these Artificial Sweeteners in it, candy, cough syrup supplements, you really really need to read your labels, that's kind of the only answer here and just basically, the labels 'a diet' or 'sugar-free', 'reduced sugar' or 'light', those should really be red flags to you that you really need to pay close attention to that label.

**Dr. Kristen Halland:** And we had talked about that on a previous episode too that, if something is labeled, you know, "sugar-free" or "salt-free" or whatever free, the food somehow looks the same, it still tastes delicious, it's the same weight, so they had to replace that with something else and usually the 'something else' is not that healthy.

**Madelaine Schaufel:** Yeah, unfortunately. Yeah, so that's kind of my ranking system based on what I read and a lot of research. I think just overall like just remembering that just from a biological standpoint, our brains are wired to crave sugar, this is normal but the encouraging thing is you really can rewire your brain. So, yeah, just remember even the healthiest sweeteners are still sweet and they still register as sweet so one way to reset is to try 'low' or 'no sweeteners' just for 1 month and I always like to tell my clients, "you can do anything for 1 month and the first 10 to 14 days, I'll tell you, will be tough but you can notice how your cravings really start to change probably around the 3-week point". So in addition, during this month to low or no sugar, you should also be following a diet moderately low in carbohydrates and really choosing whole food sources of carbs like starchy vegetables or whole grains or, you know, for example, like potato or brown rice rather than those highly processed sources of carbs like bread or pasta or cereals or chips, because those things really kind of have an impact somewhere to sugar at the end of the day in our body when it's kind of those easily broken down carbs and those are definitely going to dramatically increase your cravings as well. So, yeah, try it for a month, try to reset your taste buds, you can do this.

**Dr. Kristen Halland:** I really like the 1-month time frame as a suggestion and from an anatomical standpoint, there's two really important things that are going to happen in your body within the first few weeks. In the gut, we have a constant balance of good and bad bacteria and that bacteria impacts how our brain perceives cravings and you can actually change that gut bacteria and improve it in just 3 weeks to reduce cravings. And the second thing that's happening is on our tongue. The tongue has 10,000 taste buds on top of it and these are obviously very miniscule yet powerful and those 10,000 taste buds can completely renew and refresh in just 10 days!

**Madelaine Schaufel:** Wow, that's pretty crazy.

**Dr. Kristen Halland:** I know but that's anatomy, that's really all it is. Great, those were excellent recommendations. I love the creation of the scale from best to worst. Thanks so much for being here with us, Madelaine.

**Madelaine Schaufel:** Oh, yeah. And if you didn't get the whole words, don't forget to check the show notes.

**Dr. Kristen Halland:** That's right, the show notes are found on [www.thebalancedoc.com](http://www.thebalancedoc.com) \podcast.