

ADCES in Practice

“Just the Facts: What You and Your Clients Need to Know About Low/No-Calorie Sweeteners”

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SUMMARY

In response to the growing epidemic of diabetes, prediabetes, and obesity and their associated health impacts, many healthcare providers guide people to reduce their intake of added sugars. Sugar-sweetened beverages and other sweets/snacks are the most common food categories contributing to over-consumption of added sugars, and low- and no-calorie sweeteners (LNCS) are a resource to help people sustainably reduce added sugars without compromising taste.

Despite their proven safety, there are a series of “myths” that have been perpetuated about LNCS in today’s dynamic media landscape.

Appearing in the January 2021 edition of ADCES in Practice Journal, “Just the Facts: What You and Your Clients Need to Know About Low/No-Calorie Sweeteners” directly challenges and overcomes these misconceptions with scientific evidence, so healthcare providers can confidently recommend LNCS.

The article examines the four most common myths associated with LNCS, citing analyses of randomized control trials to dispel inaccuracies, including:

Myth: LNCS impact glucose metabolism.

Fact: No, a recent systematic review of 26 RCTs analyzed the impact of 4 common LNCS showed not only that LNCS do not increase glucose levels over the observation period but also that glucose levels gradually decreased.

Myth: LNCS cause weight gain.

Fact: No, LNCS do not cause weight gain. Recent RCTs have consistently shown that replacing added sugars with LNCS leads to significant weight reduction and can assist people who have lost weight to keep pounds off. As the paper states, numerous observational studies that have flouted the above weight gain myth have misrepresented correlation as a cause, yet there is absolutely no proof of cause and effect.

Myth: LNCS increase daily energy intake or desire for sweet foods.

Fact: No, the links between LNCS, increased energy intake, and enhanced desire for sweet foods/beverages have been consistently refuted, and LNCS has been proven to help reduce calorie intake. A recent meta-analysis/systematic review of RCTs concluded that the use of LNCS versus sugar-sweetened foods and beverages actually resulted in decreased daily energy intake and facilitated weight loss and that an increased desire for sweetness occurs regardless of whether LNCS are consumed.

Myth: Evidence shows a link between LNCS and changes in gut microbiota and metabolic disease in humans.

Fact: No, a recent critical review of the literature found no credible evidence of this assertion. In fact, the investigators reported clear evidence that changes in food choices, unrelated to LNCS use, are likely the major determinants of changes in gut microbiota.

The article specifically cites relevant, peer-reviewed data to dispel conflicting information and encourage health care professionals to help people reduce added sugars by using LNCS, a safe and effective solution.

“Health care providers play a crucial role in providing patients with practical guidance on where and how to effectively cut back on added sugars,” said Hope Warshaw, MMSc, RD, CDCES. “An important first step is separating myths about LNCS from facts, and ensuring access to accurate information along with practical strategies to implement weight management and healthier eating goals.”