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For Better Living
Sweetness Without the Calories

If you have a sweet tooth, you're not alone. It's hard to find someone who doesn't like sweets. In fact, studies with infants show they innately prefer the flavor of sweetness over saltiness, bitterness or sourness. Although sugars, in moderation, can be part of a healthful diet, the 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans emphasize choosing and preparing foods and beverages with little added sugars or caloric sweeteners. Today, our choices for sweeteners with limited calories are many. Here's the latest on what's available on the market.

Sugar alcohols. Often found in "sugar-free" candies, chewing gum, and desserts, sugar alcohols provide about half the calories of sugars and other carbohydrates. Examples include isomalt, maltitol, mannitol, sorbitol and xylitol. Even though they are called sugar alcohols, they do not contain alcohol, but can cause diarrhea, especially in children. **Saccharin.** This is the oldest no- or low-calorie sweetener and one of six currently approved for use in the United States by the Food and Drug Administration. Produced from a substance that occurs naturally in grapes, saccharin is about 300 times sweeter than table sugar. The human body cannot break down saccharin, so it does not provide any energy and is eliminated from the body unchanged. Saccharin is used in soft drinks and tabletop sweeteners such as Sweet 'N Low and Sweet 10. Because it can be used in both hot and cold foods, it is often used in combination with other low-calorie sweeteners to create the desired flavor. **Aspartame.** First approved in 1981 by the FDA, aspartame contains four calories per gram. However, because it's about 200 times sweeter than sugar, very little is needed to adequately sweeten foods. Marketed under several brand names, including Nutrasweet and Equal, aspartame is not a sugar. Rather, it is formed from two amino acids, aspartic acid and phenylalanine. Because it contains phenylalanine, people with phenylketonuria should be cautious about consuming products that have aspartame in them.

Acesulfame potassium, or Ace-K. Marketed under the brand names Sunett, Sweet One and Swiss Sweet, Ace-K is 200 times sweeter than table sugar. Like saccharin, the body cannot metabolize Ace-K and so it is excreted unchanged. Because it's heat-stable, it's used in a wide variety of foods, including candies, baked goods, soft drinks, chewing gum and tabletop sweeteners. Ace-K has a mild aftertaste when used alone so it's often combined with other sweeteners.

Sucralose. Approved by the FDA in 1998, sucralose is the only low-calorie sweetener made from sugar. It is 600 times sweeter than table sugar so a little goes a long way. Sucralose is not affected by heat and retains its sweetness in hot beverages, baked goods and processed foods. It's sold in granular form in packets and boxes under the brand name Splenda. **Neotame.** Approved by the FDA in 2002 for general use in foods and beverages, neotame is about 8,000 times sweeter than sugar so only very small amounts are needed. One advantage of neotame is that it is rapidly metabolized, completely eliminated and doesn't accumulate in the body. **Tagatose.** Technically known as D-tagatose, this low-calorie sweetener is derived from lactose, which occurs naturally in some dairy products and other foods. Tagatose has been determined by the FDA to be a GRAS (Generally Recognized As Safe) substance, which allows its use in foods and

beverages.

It's important to note that not all foods made with low- or no-calorie sweeteners are lower in calories per serving than comparable foods made with sugar or other caloric sweeteners. Always compare the Nutrition Facts label of the sugar-free version with that of the regular version to see if you're really getting fewer calories. You'll also want to compare the fat content listed on the labels. In some cases, it's best to choose the regular version of a food and simply cut back on the serving size. Also, if you like to cook, you know that sugar does more in hot foods, especially baked goods like cookies and cakes, than just add sweetness. It also affects the way the food cooks and the final texture of the product. Substituting a low-calorie sweetener for regular sugar may affect the appearance, texture and taste of the final product. For baked products, using a combination of sugar and a low-calorie sweetener can help reduce overall calories and sugar while still producing acceptable results.

Source: Colorado Cooperative Extension

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Upside Down Apple Crisp

4 cups peeled, sliced apples
1 Tablespoon sugar substitute
½ cup sugar-free maple syrup
½ cup all-purpose flour
½ cup quick oats
¾ teaspoon cinnamon
¾ teaspoon nutmeg
1/3 cup margarine or butter, room temperature

Heat oven to 375 degrees.

Mix sugar substitute, flour, oats, cinnamon, nutmeg and butter with a pastry blender until mixture is crumbly. Sprinkle mixture in the bottom of a greased 8 x 8 baking dish and top with apples. Pour maple syrup over apples and cover with foil. Bake for 30 minutes. Spoon onto plates, flipping over with the spoon as you do. Serve with ice cream if desired. Makes 6 servings.