

The Aspartame Information service responds to allegations made in research funded by Organix Brands PLC

The Aspartame Information service has dismissed allegations about the safety of aspartame made in a research paper published by Karen Lau and co-workers in Toxicological Sciences reporting a study funded by Organix Brands PLC.

Aspartame is made from two amino acids, parts of protein, identical to those found in, for example, meat, cheese, fish, or mothers' milk. When we consume aspartame, it is broken down in the digestive system to very small quantities of common dietary components. Aspartame therefore brings nothing new to the diet.

The two amino acids in aspartame are aspartic acid and phenylalanine. We consume these amino acids in much greater quantities in foods we eat daily as part of our normal diet. For example, a glass of milk (220 ml) contains seven times as much aspartic acid and more than three times as much phenylalanine as a serving (330 ml) of soft drink sweetened with aspartame alone. A new born baby will obtain more aspartic acid and phenylalanine from his mother's breast milk every day than there is in a litre of soft drink sweetened with aspartame.

The paper reports an experiment in which mouse cells were exposed in the laboratory to undigested aspartame. Exposing mouse cells to aspartame in this way has no relevance to human health. As noted above, aspartame is broken down by the digestive system to its component parts and does not enter the body. This paper does not, therefore, provide any meaningful information about aspartame safety.

Aspartame has been in safe use for 25 years. It has been reviewed and approved by governments in more than 130 countries, by the European Commission's Scientific Committee on Food and by experts of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation and the World Health Organisation.

In its review of aspartame published in December 2002, the European Commission's Scientific Committee on Foods stated, "Aspartame is unique among the intense sweeteners in that the intake of its component parts can be compared with intakes of the same substances from natural foods."

By providing sweetness without calories, aspartame makes a useful contribution to a healthy diet. It is particularly unhelpful to scare people about a safe and wholesome food ingredient that helps people to control their calorie intake at a time when governments and health authorities are increasingly concerned about obesity and overweight.

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