

American Dietetic Association evidence-based analysis puts questions to rest

April 2009

In 2008, the ADA undertook an in-depth analysis of a list of questions about aspartame using its "evidence analysis" approach, which systematically evaluates human studies (within specific parameters) related to defined questions. After the research analysis, conducted in this project by five registered dietitians (RD) chosen and trained by the ADA, is completed, a separate expert group of five RD's evaluates the work as it applies to the questions at hand. A conclusion statement is then formulated, with a "grade" applied to each conclusion statement to indicate the strength of evidence supporting that conclusion.*

The ADA project looked at the science around several questions raised by the media and others over recent years. The final analysis, posted on the ADA Evidence Analysis Library web site, puts these questions to rest. For example,

- Some have claimed that low calorie sweeteners like aspartame could have a "rebound" effect that leads people to have more of an appetite or to eat more food. The analysis found: **"There is good evidence that aspartame does not affect appetite or food intake."** This consensus statement was given a "grade 1," the highest grade in the EAL scale.
- Others have implied, despite the implausibility, that low calorie sweeteners actually "make" people gain weight. The ADA committee looked at studies in adults and concluded that using aspartame in the context of a reduced calorie diet **either does not affect weight or is associated with increased weight LOSS**. This body of research was also given a "grade 1".
- For years urban myths about aspartame's supposed "negative effects" have proliferated on the Internet. The committee evaluated peer-reviewed research from the scientific literature on this topic and concluded that: **"Aspartame consumption is not associated with adverse effects in the general population."** Once again, the committee found that the support for this statement is "grade 1."

The ADA and Ajinomoto jointly funded the overall evaluation, with research analysts and expert committee members chosen by the ADA.

**Conclusion Statements are assigned a grade by an expert work group based on the systematic analysis and evaluation of the supporting research evidence. Grade I is good; grade II, fair; grade III, limited; grade IV signifies expert opinion only; and grade V indicates that a grade is not assignable because there is no evidence to support or refute the conclusion. Recommendations are also assigned a rating by an expert work group based on the grade of the supporting evidence and the balance of benefit versus harm. Recommendation ratings are Strong, Fair, Weak, Consensus or Insufficient Evidence.*

Evidence Analysis Library:

[Click here for complete access to the full report, and to review all of the questions, along with access to summaries of the research that was considered for each.](#)