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Side Effects of Agave Sweetener

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Side Effects of Agave Sweetener

Overview

A [vegan](#)-friendly contender in the quest for a [health](#)-friendly sweetener, agave nectar gets points for its low [glycemic index](#) and the cold shoulder for its calorie content. But this sweet sap from the Mexican agave plant is more complex than that. While it is comparable to sugar, calorie-wise, the composition of agave sweetener varies depending on the processing method, says Dr. Susan Mitchell, fellow of the American Dietetic Association. The side effects depend on how much you consume and who you ask.

Nutritional Makeup

While both sugar and agave provide around 16 calories per teaspoon, it takes less agave than sugar to sweeten foods and beverages because it tastes sweeter. Sugar has a higher ratio of glucose to fructose than agave, which means it delivers glucose to your bloodstream faster, says registered dietitian Marty Davey, writing for "Veg Family." The fructose content of agave ranges from 55 to 90 percent. Although fructose eventually gets converted to glucose in the liver, the process takes longer and therefore doesn't elicit the immediate blood sugar changes that sugar triggers.

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Diabetics Cautioned

Although sap derived from the agave plant has a lower glucose content than sugar, and consequently a lesser effect on blood sugar, five years of clinical studies ending in 2010 conducted by the Glycemic Research Institute in Washington, D.C., suggest that agave nectar may not be a safer alternative for diabetics than sugar. However, the dosage amount seems to make a difference. When agave sweetener was ingested in small amounts, there were no negative side effects in diabetics. Larger doses of an undisclosed amount rendered diabetic participants unconscious, however, and in need of emergency medical care. Since agave does contain glucose, this may be the reason for the negative response. If you are diabetic or have been diagnosed with pre-diabetes, insulin resistance or metabolic syndrome, talk with your doctor about the safety of agave nectar, as well as which sweeteners are right for your condition.

Triglycerides

Mitchell says that the fructose in agave may raise triglyceride levels in diabetics. Even for non-diabetics, the American Heart Association recommends limiting fructose, both as a natural sweetener and as an added sweetener, to no more than 50 to 100 g per day if your triglycerides are high. One tablespoon of agave nectar provides 16 g of carbohydrates, 15 of which are attributable to a mixture of fructose and glucose. In comparison, a large apple, a natural source of fructose, provides 25 g of sugar.

Calorie Intake

Too much of any caloric sweetener may affect your weight status, and consequently your health. Although the calorie content of agave is similar to sugar, exact calorie content varies by brand. Sweeteners, including agave nectar, beet sugar, corn syrup and molasses, added by food manufacturers or consumers account for 16 percent of the typical American's caloric intake. While an occasional sweet indulgence won't wreak havoc on your health or your weight, stick more often with naturally sweet foods such as apples, bananas and watermelon. Use sweeteners such as agave in moderation and check with your doctor regarding specific

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Pam Murphy has been writing fitness, childcare and business-related articles since 2009. She is an active member of the National Association for Family Child Care and contributes to various websites. Murphy is a licensed childcare professional and holds a Bachelor of Arts in English from the University of West Georgia.

Article reviewed by Eric Lochridge

Last updated on: 05/26/11

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