

Column Name- The Heartland Minute

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“Artificial Sweeteners are Safe, Right?”

Believe you me, one of my favorite beverages is a cold glass of sweet tea with a couple packs of artificial sweetener mixed in. Nothing wrong with that, right? Well, artificial sweeteners, including aspartame, sucralose and others, that likely get a bad rap. The U.S. Food and Drug administration lists aspartame as “possibly carcinogenic to humans,” though that product has never been linked to cancer.

That being said, the level of aspartame that must be consumed to reach even the Acceptable Daily Intake (ADI) approved by the FDA is very high. For perspective, a person weighing 132 pounds would have to consume about 75 packets of aspartame every day to reach the ADI of 50 milligrams per kilogram of body weight per day. Or, if you are drinking soda that contains aspartame, a person who weighs 154 pounds would have to drink 9-14 cans each day, just to reach the acceptable intake level.

The FDA’s level of use must be followed by manufacturers that include aspartame or other artificial sweeteners in their foods. According to Karen Blakeslee, KSU food scientist, “Too much of any food or ingredient can be a problem to health. So, a person would have to consume very large amounts of aspartame for that product to become a problem.”

Artificial sweeteners are often a better option for people with certain health conditions, such as diabetes. They allow those people to enjoy their favorite sweet treats without the worry of raising their blood glucose level.

Aspartame is about 200 times sweeter than sugar. It is typically not used in baked goods because it is not heat stable. It can be found in foods such as chewing gum, cold breakfast cereals and dry mixes, such as beverages, powders, pudding or gelatin. For some, however, aspartame must be avoided. Products containing it must include a warning on their label for those with phenylketonuria, a rare genetic disorder in which the body cannot break down phenylalanine. So, use away, but if you’re weighing around 154 pounds, maybe just stop at 8 cans of soda in a day.

Information comes from Kansas State University food scientist, Karen Blakeslee

If you are looking for KSRE programs to attend: Deer Processing Workshop on Friday, December 6th starting at 6 pm near Eureka, Small Ruminant Success: Management to Market on Thursday December 12th starting at 5:45 pm in Eureka. Meals will be provided at both. Please contact the office for more information and to register.