Can Artificial Sweeteners Lead to Weight Gain?

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Experts have debated whether artificial sweeteners can help folks lose weight for some time. Now, new findings published in the Canadian Medical Association Journal suggest that sugar substitutes are linked to an increased risk of weight gain and greater chance of obesity, reports Medical News Today.

For the assessment, researchers at the University of Manitoba in Canada reviewed 37 studies that followed more than 400,000 people during a period of 10 years to determine whether regular consumption of artificial sweeteners was related to harmful long-term effects on weight and heart disease. Seven of the studies were randomized controlled trials (considered the gold standard in clinical research) that examined 1,003 individuals for about six months.

Scientists didn't find a consistent link between the intake of artificial sweeteners and weight loss in the short-term trials. But the other longer observational studies conducted throughout the decade indicated a notable connection between consumption of the artificial sweeteners and increases in body weight, body mass index (BMI) and waist circumference. In addition, using non-nutritive sweeteners was also linked to a higher risk of high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, stroke and heart disease. (However, the data from the randomized control trials did not support this observation.)

"Despite the fact that millions of individuals routinely consume artificial sweeteners, relatively few patients have been included in clinical trials of these products," said Ryan Zarychanski, MD, MSc, an assistant professor of the Rady Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of Manitoba. "We found that data from clinical trials do not clearly support the intended benefits of artificial sweeteners for weight management."

Scientists are currently studying how sugar substitutes might affect pregnant women, as emerging evidence shows that these sweetening alternatives may affect their infants' weight, metabolism and gut bacteria.

In conclusion, researchers stressed the need for caution until they complete more studies about the long-term risks and benefits of artificial sweeteners on health.

Click here to read more about studies that examined how artificial sweeteners are more likely than

sugar to cause weight gain.

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