Artificial Sweetener Consumption during Pregnancy

Many artificial sweeteners are considered safe by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for pregnant women to consume. Healthy nutrition may suffer, however, when pregnant women substitute foods that contain artificial sweeteners for more nutritious whole foods and beverages, such as replacing ‘no sugar added’ candy for milk as a snack.

The following artificial sweeteners ARE considered safe by the FDA for pregnant women to consume in moderation:

- **Aspartame (Equal® or NutraSweet®):** Aspartame has been a commonly used sweetener since it was approved by the FDA in 1981. It is found in many diet soft drinks, sugar-free gelatin, no sugar added yogurt and many other foods. Aspartame does not affect blood glucose levels. It is not effective for cooking because its sweetness decreases when heated. The FDA considers aspartame safe for pregnant women to consume in moderation. Note: Anyone with the rare metabolic disorder, Phenylketonuria (PKU), should avoid aspartame and all foods that contain it.

- **Sucralose (Splenda®):** Splenda has been a popular sweetener in the United States since its introduction in 1998. Splenda does not affect blood glucose levels and is found in a variety of reduced calorie food products. It can be used for cooking and baking; in fact, a special product called Splenda Measure can be used like sugar for these purposes. The FDA considers Splenda safe for pregnant women to consume in moderation.

- **Acesulfame Potassium (Sunett® or Sweet One®):** Acesulfame K, as it is commonly known, is used in sugar-free puddings, reduced calorie beverages and many other foods. First approved in 1988, Acesulfame K is often used in combination with other sweeteners and does not affect blood glucose levels. The FDA considers Acesulfame K safe for pregnant women to consume in moderation.

- **Truvia®:** Truvia is an artificial sweetener derived from the leaves of the stevia plant. This product was approved by the FDA in 2009 and is considered safe for use during pregnancy.

- **Sugar Alcohols:** There is a group of sweeteners called Sugar Alcohols that are commonly used in reduced calorie foods. Because they are incompletely absorbed and metabolized by the body, they have a lesser impact on blood glucose than table sugar. Examples of sugar alcohols include sorbitol, xylitol, maltitol, lactitol, erythritol, isomalt, mannitol and hydrogenated starch hydrolysates. When eating a food containing these sweeteners, you should count ½ of the sugar alcohol content as a carbohydrate. Side effects of sugar alcohols include gastrointestinal (GI) pain, cramping, gas and/or diarrhea. Limit your daily intake to less than 10 grams of sugar alcohol.

The following artificial sweeteners ARE NOT considered safe by the FDA for pregnant women to consume during pregnancy:

- **Cyclamate:** Cyclamates are banned in the United States but are used in Canada. This ban is due to studies that linked cyclamates to certain types of cancer.

- **Saccharin (Sweet’N Low®):** Sweet’N Low is a commonly used “tabletop” sweetener; however, it is not recommended during pregnancy because it does cross the placenta.

- **Stevia:** Food-like derivatives of this South American perennial shrub are available at health food stores only because it is not approved as a sweetener or food product by the FDA. Because of concerns regarding the safety of this product, it is not recommended for consumption by pregnant women.