

# MINUTE NUTRITION NEWS

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## Myth Busters: No Calorie Sweeteners

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As a dietitian, one of the most common questions I get asked is: “Which one is actually better – real pop or diet pop?” Although no-calorie sweeteners have been in the Canadian market for over 30 years, many are still confused by new information that continues to be found about these ingredients. Here’s the latest scoop around the most common concerns with no-calorie sweeteners.

**How Do I Know if a Product Contains No-Calorie Sweeteners?** The only way to know is by reading the labels under the ingredient list section. Health Canada allows only a limited number of sweeteners that they have deemed safe based on scientific studies. Here are the ones that you might find:

- Acesulfame – potassium (Ace-K)
- Aspartame (aka Equal® or NutraSweet®)
- Neotame
- Saccharin
- Sucralose (aka Splenda®)
- Steviol glycosides (aka Stevia or Truvia)



**Are No-Calorie Sweeteners a Good Choice if I’m Trying to Lose Weight?** Evidence is certainly mixed on this one. Some research shows that replacing sugar-sweetened beverages with a diet version can help cut calories for weight loss. Others have found the opposite where people seem to eat more of other high-calorie foods to make up for the ones missing in the diet drinks.

While the jury is still out, making the switch to no-calorie sweeteners may help cut calories but don’t depend on it as the magical solution to weight loss. Try keeping a food diary to make sure you are not replacing your missing calories with other foods and drinks.

**Do No-Calorie Sweeteners Cause Cancer?** According to health experts at National Cancer Institute and Health Canada – the answer is no. Cancer-related concerns started in the 1970s when some research studies showed bladder cancer in lab rats who consumed a specific sweetener called saccharin. What many people don’t know is that the follow-up studies have later proved that this does not apply to the human body. Larger studies that analyzed human use of saccharin have continued to support this statement. As of now, saccharin is permitted in Canada as tablets for consumers to buy and add into their foods. However, they are not allowed to be added to packaged foods and beverages by food companies.

**Are No-Calorie Sweeteners Otherwise Safe to Consume?** Just like any other nutrient or ingredient, too much of one thing is never a good thing. Generally, a can or two of diet pop a day is well within the safe limits of consuming no-calorie sweeteners.

Certain populations do need to take extra precaution. Pregnant women should avoid a sweetener called *cyclamate*. Health Canada does not allow food companies to add cyclamate into packaged foods and drinks, but it can be found as a table-top sweetener by the names of Sucaryl®, Sugar Twin® or Sweet’N Low®. Individuals with a condition called phenylketonuria (PKU) should avoid aspartame as it contains phenylalanine.



# RECIPE OF THE MONTH

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## Crispy Avocado Bites with Honey Mustard Dip

Honey is another sweetening agent that brings lots of questions. This sweetener is often preferred because of its natural state and antioxidant content. It does contain more calories per tablespoons compared to white sugar (1 tbsp honey contains 66 calories versus 1 tbsp white sugar contains 48 calories) . Be sure to use it sparingly as you would with any other sweetening agent. This honey mustard dip is paired with crispy avocado bites but feel free to substitute with other dipping options.



Makes 2 servings

### Honey Mustard Dip:

2 tbsp	honey
1 tbsp	Dijon mustard
3 tbsp	Greek yogurt, plain
1 tbsp	low fat mayonnaise
1/8 tsp	smoked paprika

### Crispy Avocado Bites:

1	Avocado
1/4 cup	flour
1	egg
1/2 cup	panko
1 clove	garlic, minced
1/4 tsp	onion powder
1/4 tsp	paprika
1/8 tsp	salt
1/8 tsp	pepper

### Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 450°F. Line a baking sheet with foil. Set aside.
2. Slice avocado into large cubes.
3. Set up three bowls. In the first bowl, add flour. In the second bowl, add eggs and beat lightly. In the third bowl, combine panko, garlic, onion powder, paprika, salt and pepper.
4. Take each avocado cube and coat in each of the bowls in the following order: flour, then egg, then panko mix. Place each coated avocado cube onto the baking sheet.
5. When all the avocado cubes are on the baking sheet, lightly coat with cooking spray. Bake for 20 minutes or until panko is slightly browned.
6. While the avocado is baking, prepare dip by combining all ingredients in a separate bowl.

**Tip:** For easier handling, buy avocados that are slightly under-ripe. They should be firm to the touch when you feel them at the grocery store.

**Nutrition information (per 1/2 avocado):** 281 calories, Fat 18g (28% DV), Carbohydrate 25g (8% DV), Protein 8g, Sodium 282mg (12% DV), Fibre 8g (31% DV), Sugar 2g

**Nutrition information (per 1/4 cup dip):** 109 calories, Fat 3g (5% DV), Carbohydrate 20g (7% DV), Protein 2g, Sodium 158mg (7% DV), Fibre 0.4g (2% DV), Sugar 19g