

Aspartame – what is it?

It is a controversial artificial sweetener, **951** (L-aspartyl-L-phenylalanine-methyl-ester). It is cheaper and about 200 times sweeter than sugar.

It comprises two amino acids — aspartic acid and phenylalanine, bound together with methanol. Occurring in natural form, these are bound up, but in aspartame they are not, breaking down readily to formaldehyde (accumulative and known to cause cancer), formic acid (venom in ant stings) and DKP (known brain tumour agent).

What's it in?

More than 6000 products worldwide: sugar-free and diet products, eg NutraSweet & Equal packs & sachets, chewing gum, sweets eg Mentos, Extra & Smints, some Eta potato chips, Yoplait Diet-Lite & Weightwatchers yoghurts; Jarrah, Weight-watchers, Nestle & Ovaltine drinks; sports drinks; dietary supplements eg Redoxon, silver top Berocca, Healtheries products incl. chewable children's vitamins; 124 medicines incl. 81 for children eg Lemsip, Panadol.

How can you tell?

Products containing aspartame often don't mention it. They might just have the warning "Phenylketonurics, contains phenylalanine" or its food number, 951. Dietary supplements and medicines don't have to be labelled with their ingredients in NZ.

What does it do to your health?

According to independent (non-industry funded) doctors and researchers, aspartame can cause a range of symptoms ranging from mild and transitory to debilitating and life-threatening, eg headaches, memory loss, vision loss, depression, seizures, coma and cancer. It can worsen or mimic the symptoms of such diseases and conditions as MS, lupus, ADD, diabetes, Alzheimer's and Parkinson's. It interacts with drugs & MSG, and induces carbohydrate cravings (= weight gain). The methanol in aspartame affects the dopamine system of the brain causing addiction. Methanol, or wood alcohol, is classified as a severe metabolic poison and narcotic.

If you are having aspartame regularly and have unexplained symptoms, try the 60-day no-aspartame test and see what happens.

See www.safefood.org.nz, www.mpwhi.com or contact Safe Food Campaign PO Box 9206 Wellington, ph Alison 04 476 8607

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