

Zeroing in on Zero-Calorie Study

OSF HealthCare Newsroom

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PRINT SCRIPT

A new study has anyone who sweetens their morning coffee or other foods on alert because of what the findings showed.

The study published in the journal Nature Medicine linked a sugar replacement called erythritol to increased cases of blood clotting, stroke, heart attack and death. Erythritol is used to add bulk or sweeten stevia, monk fruit and keto reduced sugar products. It's a sugar alcohol that can be naturally found in many fruits and vegetables.

The study found those with risk factors for cardiovascular disease, such as having diabetes, were two times as likely to have a heart attack or stroke when they had the highest levels of erythritol in their blood.

While the study is getting attention and causing concern, but OSF HealthCare dietitian Olivia DeLeon says there are many limitations to the study that need to be recognized.

"This was what we call an association study. That means they did find an association between erythritol and increased risk for cardiovascular disease or events, however it was not a causation study. It did not show that erythritol causes cardiovascular disease or incidence," DeLeon says.

She says the participants in the study also need to be kept in mind.

"These individuals were over the age of 60 and they already had pre-existing, or were at a higher risk of cardiovascular disease," DeLeon says. "It's difficult for us to apply that information to the general public and that means more research needs to be done."

DeLeon adds health experts have reviewed different types of sugar alternatives and have found them to be safe to consume.

"You can always use those other non-nutritive sweeteners such as the FDA-approved Sweet-N-Low, Equal and Splenda. Those are great options to use to limit that sugar intake," DeLeon says. "But you can also use things like fruit to add that extra flavor without adding extra calories. Instead of a sugar-sweetened beverage or an artificial-sweetened beverage, you can always chop up some strawberries, blueberries, and add that to your water for great flavor."

DeLeon also recommends having a heart-healthy diet. She breaks down some simple tips of how to achieve this.

"Limiting things such as saturated fats, added sugar, and placing a focus on adding more fiber to your diet. Saturated fats are typically found in animal products, such as meats and dairy, but it's

not that we have to completely cut these food groups out but rather choose the lean option,” DeLeon says. “Choosing that 93% lean 7% fat hamburger more often over the 80% lean 20% fat is a simple way to cut out excess saturated fat.”

DeLeon says adding fruits, vegetables, whole grains and beans to meals is a great way to add extra fiber to your diet.

You can find healthy recipes [here](#).