

Aspartame Information

OPINION OF THE SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE ON FOOD (SCF)

UPDATE ON THE SAFETY OF ASPARTAME

December 2002

KEY FINDINGS

(quotes are taken from the SCF Opinion)

Aspartame brings nothing new to the diet.

"Aspartame is unique among the intense sweeteners in that the intake of its component parts can be compared with intakes of the same substances from natural foods. It is clear that the consumption of aspartame represents only a minor source of aspartic acid, phenylalanine or methanol in the diet".

Intake of aspartame is well below the Acceptable Daily Intake (ADI), even for high level consumers (e.g. diabetics).

"The available estimates of intake of aspartame by mean and high level consumers are fairly consistent among European countries..... They show that intakes in high level consumers, including adults, children, and diabetics of all ages, range up to 10mg/kg bw/day and are thus unlikely to exceed the current ADI of 40mg/kg bw established by the SCF."

Aspartame does not increase the levels of phenylalanine in the bloodstream above the level which would normally occur after eating a meal.

"Studies both in healthy subjects and in PKU heterozygotes confirm the SCF's earlier conclusion (SCF, 1989) that despite plasma variations in Phe (phenylalanine) levels following single and repeated administrations of aspartame, Phe levels generally remain within post-prandial limits."

Aspartame does not cause brain tumours

"In 1996, a report suggesting a connection between aspartame and an increase in the incidence of brain tumours in the USA was published. The SCF considered this report and concluded that the data did not support the proposed biphasic increase in the incidence of brain tumours (SCF, 1997)"

"AFSSA - the food safety authority in France - also reviewed more recent publications on the human epidemiological data and concluded that 'The epidemiological study by Olney et al., which suggested a link between the placing on the market of aspartame and a possible increase in the frequency of brain cancers in humans, did not provide any scientific evidence to justify or demonstrate a basis for this suggestion; to date this has not been confirmed' (AFSSA, 2002). The Committee agrees with this view and reaffirms its conclusion of 1997 (SCF, 1997)".

Telephone + 44 20 7630 1418 www.aspartame.info

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The methanol produced when aspartame is digested is treated by the body in exactly the same way as methanol from other food and beverages in the diet.

"It is clear that the consumption of aspartame represents only a minor source of aspartic acid, phenylalanine or methanol in the diet."

Aspartame does not cause epilepsy

"AFSSA - the French food safety agency - has also evaluated the scientific literature on epilepsy and EEG anomalies and concluded that there is lack of evidence, based on the current state of knowledge, which would enable a causal link to be established between the consumption of aspartame and the occurrence of epileptic seizures or anomalies on an electro-encephalogram. The Committee (SCF) agrees with this conclusion..".

Aspartame does not cause changes in neurological function such as cognition, mood and behaviour

"Studies have also been specifically designed to follow up individuals reporting that they were sensitive to aspartame during post-marketing surveillance, together with studies on individuals, including children, who, because of underlying medical conditions, might be considered sensitive to aspartame. Aspartame administration did not induce any changes in behaviour, cognition, mood or learning".

Aspartame does not cause headaches

"The data on headaches received special consideration as this was a commonly reported symptom during post-marketing surveillance. The data on headaches vary in quality, but the one well controlled double-blind, cross-over trial showed that aspartame was no more likely than placebo to be associated with headaches".

Aspartame does not cause allergic type reactions

"Studies on allergic-like reactions in individuals who themselves reported such reactions to aspartame have not confirmed their occurrence when later studied under controlled conditions".

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Reference

Quotes are taken from the Opinion of the Scientific Committee on Food: Update on the Safety of Aspartame expressed on 4 December 2002.

SCF COMMITTEE

Jan Alexander, Dr.

Chief Medical Officer, Deputy Director, Folkehelse, Oslo, Norway

Susan M Barlow, Dr.

Consultant to the Medical Research Council, Institute for Environment and Health, U.K.
Vice Chair of the Committee

Angelo Carere, Professor

Director, Laboratorio di Tossicologia Comparata ed Ecotossicologia, Istituto Superiore di Sanita, Rome, Italy

Karl-Heinz Engel, Professor

Allgemeine Lebensmitteltechnologie, Technische Universität München, Freising-Weihenstephan, Germany

Albert Flynn, Associate Professor

Division of Nutritional Sciences, Department of Food Science and Technology, University College Cork, Ireland

Werner Grunow, Dr.

Berlin, Germany

Timo Hirvi, Professor

Head of Department, Kemian Osasto, Eläinlääkintä- Ja Elintarvikelaitos (EELA), Helsinki, Finland

Ada G.A.C. Knaap, Dr.

Senior Researcher, Rijksinstituut voor Volksgezondheid en Milieu, Bilthoven, The Netherlands
Chair of the Committee

Berthold Koletzko, Professor of Paediatrics

Kinderklinik und Kinderpoliklinik, Dr. von Haunersches Kinderspital, Universität München, München, Germany

John Christian Larsen, Dr.

Head of Department, Institut for Fødevarerikkerhed og Toksikologi, Søborg, Denmark

Sven E. Lindgren, Professor

Statens Livsmedelverk, Uppsala, Sweden

Bevan Moseley, Professor

Reading, United Kingdom

Andreu Palou, Professor

Director, Departament de Biologia Fonamental i Ciències de la Salut, Universitat de les Illes Balears, Palma de Majorca, Spain
Vice Chair of the Committee

Wim H.M. Saris, Professor

Scientific Director, Onderzoeksinstituut NUTRIM, Vakgroep Humane Biologie, Universiteit van Maastricht, Maastricht, The Netherlands

Josef Schlatter, Dr.

Head of Food Toxicology Section, Food Science Division, Swiss Federal Office of Public Health, Zürich, Switzerland

Paul P. Tobback, Prof. Em. Dr. ir.

Departement Levensmiddelen en Microbiële Technologie, Faculteit Landbouwkundige en Toegepaste Biologische, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Heverlee, Belgium

Philippe Verger, Dr.

Direction Scientifique "Nutrition Humaine et Sécurité Alimentaire", Institut National de la Recherche Agronomique, Paris, France

Jean-Michel Wal, Dr.

Director, Laboratoire d'Immuno-Allergie Alimentaire, Service de Pharmacologie et Immunologie (SPI), Institut National de la Recherche Agronomique, Centre d'études de Saclay, Gif sur Yvette, France

Ronald Walker, Professor

Food Safety Group, School of Biological Sciences, University of Surrey, Guildford, United Kingdom