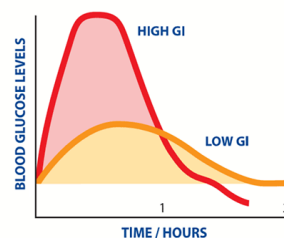


The Truth about Agave Nectar: Safe for Persons with Diabetes?

Is agave nectar (also known as agave syrup) a safe alternative to table sugar for persons with diabetes? This question has been a recent topic of debate for health professionals. The facts about agave nectar are as follows:

1. Agave nectar is a natural *nutritive sweetener*, meaning it is not calorie-free like some other non-nutritive sweeteners.
 - Each tablespoon of agave nectar contains approximately 16 grams of carbohydrates and 64 calories. Many persons with diabetes control their blood glucose by counting carbohydrates using meal exchanges. One “exchange” or “carbohydrate choice” is equal to 15 grams of carbohydrates; therefore, 1 tablespoon (or 3 teaspoons) of agave nectar is equal to 1 carbohydrate choice.
 - On food labels, sugar is not always identified by the word *sugar*; it has many disguises. It can be called sucrose, fructose, corn syrup, dextrin, polyols (sugar alcohols such as xylitol, sorbitol, etc.) and many other names. All of these different nutritive sweeteners contribute about the same number of calories per gram.
2. The glycemic index (a measure of the effect that foods have on blood sugar levels) of agave nectar is lower than other nutritive sweeteners.
 - Agave nectar will not raise blood sugar levels as rapidly as table sugar. However, it *will* still raise blood sugar levels. It should be used in moderation.
3. The primary sweetening agent in agave nectar is fructose, which has the same number of calories as table sugar, but tastes sweeter.
 - Agave nectar is 90% fructose and 10% glucose (fructose and glucose are carbohydrates). Fructose tastes sweeter than table sugar. Because of this, less agave nectar can be used to make food just as sweet as table sugar does. Recipes that call for table sugar can be modified by using agave nectar, but a smaller amount would need to be used. Also, some of the liquid in the recipe would need to be left out due to the liquid nature of agave nectar.
4. Agave nectar has minimal antioxidant activity.
 - Natural, unrefined sweeteners are thought to have high levels of antioxidant activity. Antioxidants are protective against many chronic diseases. However, very minimal antioxidant activity has been found in agave nectar.



5. The American Botanical Council recommends that pregnant women do not use agave nectar, but has found it safe for use in the general public.

The consensus among health professionals is that agave nectar should be treated like a sugar for persons with diabetes. If agave nectar is chosen as a sweetener by persons with diabetes, it should count as a carbohydrate choice in a meal: 1 tablespoon = ~15 grams carbohydrate = 1 carbohydrate choice. Agave nectar is safe to enjoy in moderation!

References

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