



Newsletter

November 2025

Too sweet to Be true?

The harmful effects of added sugars have been long established for multiple chronic diseases, leading food companies to use artificial sweeteners instead in a wide range of food and drinks consumed daily by millions of people worldwide; however, are these artificial sweeteners really better for us?

Artificial sweeteners are much sweeter than regular sugar, so only small amounts are needed to achieve the desired taste. This of course has an economic benefit for manufacturers as it is far cheaper to use. Artificial sweeteners are often used in “sugar-free” or “diet” foods and beverages, including soft drinks, ready meals, desserts, and yogurts. Yet there are a growing number of studies that suggest artificial sweetener consumption is not without risk. Here we sum up some of the most recent findings.

While in theory eating ‘diet’ versions should satisfy a sweet craving with less calories, a 2017 study by Imperial College London and Brazilian universities found that **artificially sweetened beverages (ASBs) are not better for weight management than sugary drinks**, with researchers suggesting consumers may overcompensate for lower calorie intake in drinks by consuming more food. Furthermore, another study by Anglia Ruskin University, found that an artificial sweetener called neotame (E961) **can cause significant harm to the gut** by breaking down the layer of cells that line the intestine and by causing previously healthy gut bacteria to become diseased, resulting in them invading the gut wall.

Alarmingly, some research has linked artificial sweetener consumption to poorer cognitive and cardiovascular health outcomes. A 2017 study in the journal Stroke found that **daily consumption of artificially sweetened beverages (ASBs) was associated with a nearly three-fold increased risk of stroke or dementia** compared to those who consumed ASBs less than once a week. While a more recent study in Brazil found that artificial sweetener consumption was associated with **accelerated cognitive decline in adults**, with high-intake participants showing a decline equivalent to 1.6 years of ageing compared to those with the lowest intake.

In 2022 a BMJ study found a potential direct association between higher artificial sweetener consumption and an **increased risk of cardiovascular disease**, including heart attack and stroke, especially for aspartame, acesulfame potassium, and sucralose. More recently, a 2024 study in Circulation: Arrhythmia and Electrophysiology found that consuming more than 2 litres (about six cans) of diet soda or other artificially sweetened beverages per week was associated with a **20% increased risk of atrial fibrillation** (an irregular heartbeat), compared to people who drank none.

Over the years there has been much discussion regarding whether the intake of artificial sweeteners can be linked to an increase in cancer. In 2022, researchers in France published the results of a giant cohort study, composed of more than 100,000 participants, evaluating the link between cancer risk and artificial sweeteners. The study found that **aspartame in particular was associated with a 15% increased risk of cancer**. However, the study couldn't determine actual causation. The World Health Organization (WHO) classified the sweetener aspartame as **"possibly carcinogenic to humans."** The "possibly carcinogenic" label highlights that more robust research is needed to determine the potential long-term health effects of aspartame. It does not imply a definite cause-and-effect relationship with cancer.

All the studies mentioned in this article have called for further research to be carried out to better understand the potential health implications of aspartame and other non-sugar sweeteners.

To avoid artificial sweeteners:

- turn to natural alternatives such as honey, maple syrup or agave syrup
- choose organic, organic standards prohibit sweeteners.

Open Tuesday to Saturday 61 Grove Road, Emmer Green, RG4 8LJ
9am to 6pm T: 0118 946 1188 W: www.truefood.coop



Incredible independents!

At this time of year shops are filled with the same generic Christmas options. These are often mass produced, environmentally unsound and uninspiring. At True Food we offer something different; high-quality, carefully crafted products from independent businesses. Buying independent products means:

- supporting small businesses and local creators, helping to keep money within the community and promote economic diversity
- enjoying high quality, creative products made with care and craftsmanship
- prioritising sustainability, fair trade, and often, welfare initiatives.

So if you're looking for Christmas chocolate, baked goods, alcohol, cheese or gifts consider supporting:



Cocoa Loco, an award-winning West Sussex-based company that creates handmade, artisan organic and Fairtrade chocolate products, founded in 2005. The company focuses on ethical practices, using 100% plastic-free packaging, sourcing cocoa from the Dominican Republic, and paying fair wages to cocoa farmers. **Try: chocolate shapes and lollies, perfect for a stocking.**

The Authentic Bread Company is a family-run, Gloucestershire-based bakery founded in 1995, known for its organic breads, cakes, and pastries made using traditional methods.

Try: vegan mince pies; melt in the mouth short-crust vegan pastry, stuffed with organic brandy mincemeat, made with Herefordshire Apples and plump vine fruits.



Walcher is a family-owned South Tyrolean distillery, founded in 1966, known for its high-quality organic spirits and liqueurs using local, sun-ripened ingredients from its farm in Eppan. **Try: Mountain Cream Hazelnut Liqueur, a creamy liqueur with the rich aroma of roasted hazelnuts and a slight hint of chocolate.**



Croppwell Bishop Creamery is one of the few remaining family-operated Stilton producers. The creamery upholds time-honoured methods passed down through generations, ensuring every cheese reflects the tradition, skill, and excellence that define true Stilton craftsmanship. **Try: Stilton, Best Blue Cheese winner at the British Cheese Awards and voted Best Organic Cheese at the 2023 & 2025 BOOM (Best of Organic Market) Awards.**



Zaytoun is a UK-based social enterprise that supports Palestinian farming communities. Founded in 2004, Zaytoun reinvests 100% of its profits into its mission of providing fair trade for producers, supporting community resilience, and preserving Palestinian culinary heritage. The company's products are hand-harvested and prepared by farmers in Palestine, ensuring their work is recognized and supported through trade rather than aid. **Try: lemon olive oil soap, hand-crafted in small batches by a family business in Nablus, it's gentle, moisturising and smells amazing.**

Unsung heroes: Naturli vegan block

In this latest instalment of our regular column, True Food member and volunteer, Colin Bates promotes the virtues of vegan block!



For something with a distinctive scandi-cool-looking black-wrapping and little red Danish flag, "Vegan Block" is such an unappealing name. But this month's unsung hero helped me finally make the jump away from butter to a non-dairy alternative. Now I can still enjoy my Saturday Wild Frog loaf, richly "blocked", cold or decadently melting on hot toast, and not feel I'm missing out on something I've always enjoyed. Non-dairy margarines have been a perennial source of disappointment for me, but this hits the spot with its blend of shea, coconut, rapeseed and almond oils, and its firm texture, close to butter but still spreadable straight from the fridge. Its no angel on the fat front (and perhaps that's its guilty secret), but still comes in some 10% lower than butter for overall fat content, and 20%+ lower for saturated fats. Look for it low-down in the middle fridge at True Food.

Stir-up Sunday, seasonal baking or how to cheat!

Sunday 23 November is the traditional day for making Christmas pudding, Christmas cake and the mincemeat for mince pies. True Food is well stocked with all the dried fruits, nuts, spices and flours you could need for a satisfying day of stirring. If however you don't have the time (or inclination!) True Food will be selling organic Christmas puddings, cakes, mince pies (including vegan pies) and mincemeat.