OH, THE SWEET LIFE!

This took a while to compile (hey that rhymes!), so without much of my usual chatter, here is a comprehensive A-Z list of all the available sugar and sugar substitute products (natural and artificial) that I could find and whether or not they are good, bad, neutral or downright awful. Remember, though, that even the "good" sweeteners should be limited as too much can have a detrimental effect on your health.

Please Note: The Glycemic Index I refer to regarding some of the products listed is a measure of the effects of carbohydrates on blood sugar levels, therefore the lower the glycemic index, generally the better it is. I did not include exact numbers of glycemic index here because there is some debate on the subject and the specific number doesn't really matter. For comparison's sake, refined white sugar and high fructose corn syrup have the highest glycemic index, so everything else is relative to that.

Acesulfate Potassium

Also sold as SweetOne, acesulfate potassium (or Ace-K), is a chemical sweetener with a chemical, bitter aftertaste, usually combined with other sweeteners especially aspartame and sucralose to mask the taste. They put it in a lot of protein powders which really boggles my mind. Oh, yeah you can use it for baking, but why on earth would you want to? My recommendation: AVOID

Agave Nectar/syrup

Agave syrup or nectar is commercially produced in Mexico from a variety of agave plants. Agave syrup is 1.4 times sweeter than sugar so you need about 20% less for the same sweetness as sugar – overall this equals less calories. It doesn't crystallize the way honey does and you can use it for baking and cooking. Agave Nectar was found to have a fairly low glycemic index, lower than honey and significantly lower than sugar. Be aware, though, that not all agave is made the same way; some are so highly processed you might as well have HFCS, so make sure you buy a reputable brand. My recommendation: I LIKE IT, but that doesn't mean you should go to town and pour it on everything.

Aspartame

Found under the brand names of Equal and Nutrasweet, Aspartame is the combination of two amino acids, phenylalanine and aspartic acid. It is 200 times sweeter than sugar and calorie free but that doesn't make it worth consuming. It seems to actually stimulate the appetite and can cause serious side effects such as PKU seizures (phenylketonuria), high blood pressure, painful headaches, insomnia, ovarian cancer, and brain tumors. Since it cannot be used for cooking, the use of aspartame is just a ridiculous way to save 30 calories in your coffee or tea in my opinion. If you are drinking it in your artificial beverage or diet soda, well, congratulations, you've effectively found 2 good ways to harm your body at one time. My

recommendation: UM, HAVE YOU BEEN READING THIS?

Barley Malt or Rice Syrup

Mild, natural sweeteners made from barley sprouts or rice cooked into a syrup. It is 40% as sweet as sugar. A good choice for diabetics because it is digested slowly and does not disrupt the insulin levels. Excellent for replacing some of the corn syrup in baking recipes (I say some, because if you replace all, it may not taste sweet enough for a particular recipe). My Recommendation: GOOD FOR HEALTHIER BAKING.

Blackstrap Molasses

White refined table sugar is sugar cane with all the nutrition taken out. Black strap molasses is all of that nutrition that was taken away, the leftover sludge of the sugar making process (doesn't that just sound yummy?). A quality organic (must be organic!) molasses provides iron, calcium, copper, magnesium, phosphorus, potassium and zinc, and is alkalizing to the body. Ounce per ounce it contains more calcium than milk, more iron than eggs, and more potassium than ANY other food and the body seems to assimilate all the minerals quite readily. For this reason, some people take it as a supplement for example for anemia. However I don't recommend replacing recipes calling for molasses with this because you will not like the outcome, unless you happen to like your baked goods on the bitter side. My recommendation: USE AS A SUPPLEMENT, OR IN BAKING IF A RECIPE CALLS FOR IT.

Brown Sugar

Brown sugar is just plain old white sugar with a little bit of molasses mixed in. My recommendation: AVOID, unless it's organic (has more nutrients) then USE IN MODERATION.

Coconut sugar

Originally made from the sugary sap of the date palm or sugar date palm, it's also made from the sap of coconut palms. With a relatively low glycemic index, coconut palm sugar is the new rage among health nuts. Yes, I'm one of them – I love the taste and texture of coconut sugar and occasionally use it in baking. I'd probably use it more often if it wasn't so expensive. It's often called "coconut nectar sugar" or "coconut sugar". High in potassium and slightly less calories (but also less sweet) than sugar. My recommendation: GOOD STUFF

Corn syrup

Corn syrup is commercial glucose derived from cornstarch. It is completely devoid of nutrition but still not AS bad as high fructose corn syrup. My recommendation: AVOID, use Agave syrup or Brown rice syrup (or a combination) instead.

Date sugar

Derived from ground, dried dates, date sugar is about half as sweet as table sugar. High in potassium and very alkalizing, but it also has a high glycemic load and should be used sparingly for diabetics. My recommendation: USE IN MODERATION, but it’s definitely better than white sugar.

Demerera sugar

Here’s some useless trivia: Demerera is named after a colony in Guyana, which first began producing and selling the sugar in large volume. It is extracted primarily from sugar cane, rather than sugar beets and tends to be more expensive than refined sugars as a result. Because demerara sugar is not heavily refined, it has a rich, creamy, molasses-like flavor which enhances baked goods. The large grains also remain crunchy through cooking, which makes demerara sugar a great choice of sprinkled topping. My recommendation: USE IN MODERATION, but again, it’s better than white sugar.

Dextrose

A synthetic monosaccharide derivative of cornstarch, it’s a another form of glucose. My recommendation: AVOID

Erythritol

—See Sugar Alcohol.

Fructooligosaccharides (usually abbreviated FOS)/Inulin

These are naturally-occurring, mildly sweet, indigestible carbohydrates. FOS does not affect blood sugar levels and is therefore suitable for diabetics and hypoglycemics. All forms of FOS act as dietary fiber and has been shown to reduce both cholesterol and triglyceride levels and may provide improved absorption of minerals such as calcium, magnesium, iron, and phosphate. FOS is commonly extracted from **chicory roots** and **Jerusalem artichokes** (as it occurs in relatively large quantities in these items,) but it is also found in many other vegetables. FOS cannot be broken down by the human digestive system, but they can be broken down and consumed by the bacteria in the digestive tract. For this reason, FOS is considered to be a prebiotic-a substance which provides nourishment for the good gut flora. It’s often combined with Stevia to enable it’s use as a spoon for spoon replacement for sugar. My recommendation: BENEFICIAL.

Fructose, Crystalline

Fructose is commercially produced and refined from cornstarch, but has the same molecular structure as fruit sugar. Fructose takes longer to digest so it better than sugar on the glycemic index, meaning that it releases sugar into the bloodstream more slowly. Fructose is twice as sweet as sugar and for dieters, it seems to decrease the need for edible calories if taken prior to

eating, but it may raise blood fats and contribute to heart disease. Less dental plaque is reported with the use of fructose, but my recommendation? AVOID

Fruit Juice Concentrate

A derivative of grapes usually, this highly refined product contains about 68% soluble sugar. The fructose, glucose and sucrose levels vary with each fruit used. High glycemic load, not recommended for diabetics. Note: Sometimes extra corn syrups are added to this to get the sugar content up. My recommendation: AVOID. If it's pure organic fruit juice concentrate, USE IN MODERATION.

Glycerine

There's a LOT of confusion and contraversy about this one. Glycerine is categorized as a carbohydrate and also an alcohol. It is a colorless, odorless, viscous liquid with a very sweet and slightly astringent taste. Glycerine is not chemically related to sugar and seems to have a very negligible effect on insulin and blood sugar levels, thus making it usable as a sweetener for diabetics, hypoglycemics, and people with Candida yeast problems. Food grade glycerine is produced from animal sources (usually tallow,) vegetable sources (various vegetable oils, especially coconut) and from propylene alcohol. While the molecular structure of glycerine from any of these sources is exactly the same, there are obvious concerns as to the source of the glycerine which one may be consuming – and the source is not often listed on the container. Glycerin is digested and used by the body in different ways, or not at all, depending upon the state one is in when one consumes it. My recommendation: AVOID, if for no other reason than the fact that they also use this stuff in soap.

Healthesweet

Found in health food stores, this Canadian made sweetener is a combination of Erythritol and FOS, and has no aftertaste. The claim is it can be used for baking, but I haven't tried it yet. My recommendation: FINE IN SMALL QUANTITIES, if you don't have digestive/bowel problems. I personally use this on occasion in my coffee – organic, swiss water decaf, of course See the individual ingredients for more details.

High fructose corn syrup, or HFCS

A famously overused sugar and probably the root cause of many allergies and weight problems. Seems to be in almost everything we eat these days. Most corn syrup also contains added sugar syrup because glucose is only half as sweet as white table sugar. It absorbs in the bloodstream very quickly making it a very high glycemic load food. My recommendation: AVOID.

Honey

A natural sweetener with proven bioactive antibiotic and antiseptic properties, honey is made from flower nectar and the enzyme bees mix with it

called invertase. Honey contains vitamins and enzymes necessary for the proper metabolism and digestion of glucose and other sugar molecules, however it should be avoided if you have diabetes, Candida, or other sugar issues like hypoglycemia. Darker honeys contain higher amounts of minerals than lighter honeys. Read my earlier blog post about honey for more information on the many different types available. My recommendation: RAW HONEY IS GOOD STUFF, but use in moderation. Stay away from pasteurized honey you find at the grocery store, its has much less health properties and is more acidic to the body.

Just Like Sugar

A sweetener found in health food stores, it contains inulin (from chicory, see FOS), orange peel, Vitamin C and Calcium and has no calories, and it tastes pretty good (no aftertaste). That's the good news. The bad news? You can't cook with it and it also contains maltodextrin, a polysaccharide that is used as a food additive. It is produced from potato or corn starch by partial hydrolysis. My recommendation: USE IN MODERATION, although it's definitely better than artificial sweeteners.

Lactose

A disaccharide sugar derived of milk used mainly in infant foods and baked goods, but it is sometimes used as a filler for nutritional supplements. Those people with lactose intolerance experience gastrointestinal disturbances after consuming it. My recommendation: FINE, if you aren't lactose intolerant.

Lo Han Kuo (also spelled Lo Han Guo)

I never even heard of this before writing this post. Apparently it is a sweet Chinese fruit in the cucumber family. The Lo Han fruit has been used by local people in southern provinces of China for centuries as a sweetener and a medicinal herb for the treatment of lung congestion, colds, sore throats, and for minor stomach and intestinal problems. Modern scientific research has shown that Lo Han extracts help relieve gastritis, constipation and respiratory inflammations. There has never been any recorded incidence of adverse reactions to Lo Han fruit or its extractives. As is also the case with Stevia, the human digestive system is unable to break down the sweet compounds within Lo Han fruit. Consequently, it triggers no rise in blood sugar levels and is completely safe for diabetics and hypoglycemics. It also helps promote the metabolization of stored body fat. The whole dried fruit is 300 times sweeter than sucrose. My recommendation: NOT SURE, I have to try it first. Actually I have to find it first.

Mannitol

—See Sugar Alcohol

Maltose/Malt sugar

Maltose is produced in the malting and fermentation of grains and is present

in beer and malted breakfast cereals, it is also used as a source of carbohydrates for some infant formulas. Does not occur in foods (unless specifically added as malt) but formed during the digestion of starch. It is one-third as sweet as sucrose. My recommendation: body treats it as sugar so USE IN MODERATION

Maple sugar

Maple sugar is crystallized maple syrup, which has been concentrated. My recommendation: SAME AS MAPLE SYRUP.

Maple syrup

Derived from concentrated sap of sugar maple trees. Note: Unless the product is labeled pure maple syrup, it is probably mixed with corn syrup. If you're not sure, check the price since the real stuff is a lot more expensive, but it also tastes unbeleivably better than the imitation stuff. Pure maple syrup has more nutritional value than white sugar and is alkaline to the body (most people eat a highly acidic diet which promotes disease), however, it's still a high glycemic load product. My recommendation: USE IN MODERATION

Molasses

Molasses is a viscous by-product of the processing of sugar cane or sugar beets into sugar. The quality of molasses depends on the maturity of the sugar cane or sugar beet, the amount of sugar extracted, and the method of extraction. Sweet sorghum syrup is known in some parts of the United States as molasses, though it is not true molasses. Sulfured molasses is made from young sugar cane. Sulfur dioxide (yep, Sulphites, that awful allergy producing stuff) which acts as a preservative, is added during the sugar extraction process. Unsulfured molasses is made from mature sugar cane, which does not require treatment with sulfur. There are three grades of molasses: mild or barbados, also known as *first molasses*; dark, or *second molasses*; and blackstrap molasses, with blackstrap containing the highest amount of nutrients. These grades may be sulfured or unsulfured. Molasses is a common ingredient in baking and can be a substitute for honey, dark corn syrup, or maple syrup. My recommendation: USE ONLY THE UNSULPHERED VARIETY.

Organic sugar

Organic sugar is cultivated from sugar cane or sugar beets not treated with pesticides. It is manufactured with minimal additives. (Manufacturers use chemicals to bleach the color and filter out impurities when processing refined or "white" sugar). It's definitely a step up from white sugar, but again, still has that high glycemic load, so my recommendation: USE IN MODERATION

Peru Root (Yacon)/Yacon syrup

Yacon is a dark brown, tubular root from Peru and scientists say is good for the gut, potentially safeguards against cancer, helps absorption of calcium and vitamins, and can reduce the blood sugar peaks from eating sweet food

that make trouble for diabetics. It has a crunchy texture like a water chestnut and is refreshingly sweet and juicy. Left in the sun, its sweetness intensifies, and it can be eaten as a fruit, consumed in drinks, syrups, cakes or pickles. Although its packed with sugar, this particular sugar is FOS, so as mentioned earlier, it cannot be absorbed by the body, contains half the calories of sugar and promotes beneficial bacteria in the colon. It has nutritional value and about half the calories of sugar. My recommendation: SOUNDS GOOD TO ME but I haven't tried it (yet).

Raw sugar/Turbinado sugar

Unrefined raw sugar, also known as turbinado sugar, is made from the juice of the sugar cane plant and has trace minerals and nutrients present whereas refined (white) sugar is devoid of all nutrients. Not to be confused with brown sugar, sucanat or turbinado sugar although they all look similar. It contains minerals and nutrients that are stripped from refined white sugar and regular brown sugar. Raw sugar contains roughly eleven calories per teaspoon (white has 16) and has the same vitamin and mineral consistency that is found in the juice from the sugarcane plant. These minerals include Phosphorus, Calcium, Iron, Magnesium, and Potassium. In addition, when sugar is refined and processed there are many harmful ingredients that are added to the sugar as a result. Unrefined raw sugar does not have these harmful chemicals. Some of these include: Phosphoric Acid, Sulfur Dioxide, and Formic Acid. My recommendation: USE IN MODERATION.

Saccharin

Sold under the trade name of Sweet n Low (U.S.) Fun fact: Saccharin was first produced in 1878 by a chemist working on coal tar derivatives in a laboratory at John Hopkins University. The sweet taste of saccharin was discovered when Fahlberg noticed a sweet taste on his hand one evening, and connected this with the compound which he had been working on that day. Saccharin is made from petroleum and toluene, is intensely sweet and calorie free. It has been linked to bladder cancer in animal studies, in case the fact that it's made from total chemicals didn't bother you, although many still maintain that it's perfectly safe to use, it's called Denial. My recommendation: AVOID.

Sodium cyclamate

Sold under the trade name of Sugar Twin or Sweet n Low (Canada), sodium cyclamate is another artificial sweetener accidentally discovered in a lab, this one in the early 1900's. It was banned in the U.S. in 1970 (hence the reason Sweet n Low has Saccharin in the U.S., but sodium cyclamate in Canada…..aren't we lucky?) It has been shown to have carcinogenic effects. My recommendation: IF YOU'RE CONSUMING THIS, I HAVE NO IDEA WHY YOU ARE READING MY BLOG.

Sorbitol

—See Sugar Alcohol

Sorghum Molasses/Sweet sorghum

Sweet sorghum is a thick syrup made from juice extracted from sorghum cane and contains important vitamins and minerals, including iron, potassium and calcium. Many years ago, sweet sorghum was a popular sweetener used extensively in baking and cooking. With the popularity of easier-to-manufacture refined sweeteners, sweet sorghum has declined in popularity and availability. Sweet sorghum syrup can replace honey or molasses in baking recipes in straight one-for-one replacement. To replace molasses in baking recipes, keep in mind that sweet sorghum is sweeter than molasses so less might be needed. Sweet sorghum does not interact well with baking powder, however, so recipes with baking powder should not be used with it. My recommendation: It's still a high glycemic food so USE IN MODERATION.

Splenda

The fact that so many people use Splenda, otherwise known as sucralose, is a testament to how powerful the media is. I particularly love the slogan "it's made from sugar so it tastes like sugar." What they fail to explain is the chemical chlorination process they put sugar through in order to make this highly toxic product. My recommendation: AVOID, no matter what Noreen Gilletz says.

Stevia

Stevia, known as "sweet herb", this plant is 25 times sweeter than sugar when made as an infusion with 1 teaspoon stevia leaves to 1 cup of water. Two drops of this infusion equal 1 teaspoon of sugar in sweetness. It is safe for a diabetic as it is does not change blood glucose levels. There are some healing benefits of stevia as well. Stevia is known to help regulate blood sugar, helps to lower high blood pressure, aids in weight loss by decreasing the desire for sugary foods. Some people even report that it reduces their desire for tobacco and alcoholic beverages. So why don't we see more of it? Apparently the import of stevia was heavily influenced by Nutrasweet politics. Shocking, I know. My recommendation: PERFECTLY SAFE, but it does have an aftertaste.

Sucanat

Unlike refined and processed white sugar, Sucanat retains its molasses content (remember that molasses is what contains all the nutrients from the sugar cane). Essentially, Sucanat is pure dried sugar cane juice, so it ranks highest in nutritional value. It can be used in place of sugar but it definitely has a distinctive molasses flavor unlike sugar. Although it has nutritional value, it still has a high glycemic load (like all sugar) so diabetics beware. My recommendation: USE IN MODERATION, but definitely a better nutritional choice than all other sugars.

Sugar Alcohol

The most common sugar alcohols you will find as an added sweetener in foods is ***Maltitol, Mannitol, Sorbitol, Xylitol*** *and* ***Erythritol***. These sweeteners

were given this consumer-friendly name because part of their structure resembles sugar and part is similar to alcohol. Sugar alcohols do not contain ethanol, which is found in alcoholic beverages. They occur naturally in small amounts in fruits and vegetables, including berries, apples, and plums, but for large-scale commercial use they are manufactured from common sugars. While they are chemically very similar to sugars, they are less sweet than sugars and have fewer calories per gram. Because it has a low digestible energy value, it is used to provide bulk in foods, thereby reducing the caloric content. It is known that eating too much of these substances can cause gastro-intestinal discomfort, such as cramps, bloating and gas as well as strong laxative effects. The likelihood of such effects occurring is related to the amount consumed and, therefore, increases with the consumption of more than one product containing sugar alcohols. There is a wide variation, however, in sensitivity between individuals to these effects. By the way, those who have had gastric bypass surgery should avoid all sugar alcohols with the exception of ***Erythritol***. Of the sugar alcohols, **Erythritol** has much fewer instances of the unpleasant digestive side effects. On the other hand, ***Xylitol*** has grown in popularity and is marketed as a "better" sugar alcohol because it neutralizes acids in the mouth and reduces tooth decay. However, **Xylitol** causes the same gastrointestinal problems and is therefore not much different than the ones mentioned above. My recommendation for all the sugar alcohols: FINE FOR USE IN SMALL QUANTITIES if you don't get any adverse symptoms, and if you're going to choose one, go with Erythritol.

Truvia

A brand of sweetener comprised of a combination of erythritol and rebiana (leaves of the Stevia plant steeped in water). My recommendation: FINE, if you don't have irritable bowel syndrome or other digestive problems.

Xylitol

—See Sugar Alcohol.

As you can see, there are a lot of options out there…… I would love to hear your comments and what sugar/sugar substitutes/sweeteners you like to use, and whether you've had success trying to replace white sugar in your own recipes with some of the above alternatives. Have a healthy (and sweet!) day