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Beware the Sorbitol!

Many of us have become weight-conscious, as evidenced by the multitude of “dietetic,” “diabetic” and “sugar-free” preparations available on grocery store shelves.



As the popularity of sugar-free products has increased, manufacturers have improved the sugar substitute, from cyclamates (banned because of the cancer risk), to saccharine (bitter aftertaste), to aspartame (Nutrasweet), to the newest artificial sweetener, sucralose (Splenda).

There is, however, an almost hidden sugar substitute: sorbitol. Sorbitol is never publicized nor advertised, yet it is present in a striking percentage of sugar-free products. Even products boasting “Nutrasweet” and bearing the Nutrasweet logo on their label, often have sorbitol listed as an ingredient in

the label’s fine print. Sorbitol may even be the main ingredient! Sorbitol is the liquid sweetener in many elixir medications, where it is listed as an “inactive” or “inert” ingredient. Sorbitol can also be found in a number of products which would not be expected to contain a sugar substitute.

Sorbitol is technically a polyalcohol sugar, which is sweet to the taste. It cannot be digested and is thus not absorbed. It therefore does not contribute calories to our bodies, and products containing this polyalcohol sugar can still be called “sugar-free”.

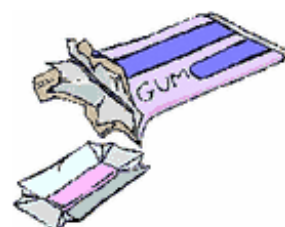
Undigested sorbitol eventually reaches the colon, where it is digested by bacteria. This bacterial action on sorbitol produces gas and causes water to be drawn into the intestine. In short, sorbi-



tol is a sweet, gas-producing laxative.

Cases of abdominal cramping and diarrhea so severe as to require hospitalization can be caused by the simple use of sugar-free products containing sorbitol, such as gum or candies. In sensitive individuals, chewing as little as three sticks of sugarless gum can cause diarrhea. Liquid medications may have a similar effect.

We are all occasionally the victims of our own good intentions. Remember that it is prudent to be aware of what is taken into our bodies. Patients suffering from intestinal cramping, bloating, excessive gas, belching or diarrhea may be sensitive to even small amounts of sorbitol. A careful search of product labels may disclose sorbitol, and the elimination of sorbitol may result in improvement in gastrointestinal symptoms.



Examples of products containing sorbitol:

Maalox liquid
Mylanta liquid
Triaminic Syrup
Imodium A-D Liquid
Advil Liqui-Gels
Tums Sugar Free
Robitussin cough drops
Certs mints
several brands of tooth paste

McDonald's Big Mac
Burger King onion rings
Herb Ox Bouillon
Hormel Dried Beef
Hormel Kids Spaghetti
Wrigley's sugarless gum
Life Savers sugarless
Log Cabin sugarfree syrup
Smucker's sugarfree topping

Breyer's Carb Smart ice cream
Edy's sugarfree ice cream
Ben & Jerry's no sugar ice cream
Baskin Robbins no sugar ice cream
Kellogg's cereal bars
Cheerios cereal bars
Trix cereal bars
Nathan's hot dogs