

Sweeten your Holidays with Stevia



By Dr. Jean-Jacques Dugoua, ND

As the holidays approach, our taste for sweets is heightened. We have all been tempted by the yummy chocolates and candies that define the season. We think to ourselves, "What the heck, it's the holidays after all." But come January, there are the extra pounds and the terrible guilt. What if there was a way to enjoy some sweets and get some health benefit at the same time?

Sugar substitute

Stevia is a plant; the leaf is used as a natural sweetener. Stevia leaf contains stevioside, which has been shown not to increase calories and is 100 times sweeter than sucrose (white sugar). In Japan, stevia has been commercialized as a natural sweetener for over 20 years. Just take a bite of a stevia leaf or try some stevia powder and you'll see how sweet it is.

Stevia helps with diabetes

Stevia is useful in the prevention and treatment of diabetes. It has been shown to reduce glucose absorption from the gastrointestinal tract, thereby lowering the amount of sugar that gets into the blood. Stevia has also been shown to increase insulin secretion from the pancreas, the organ responsible for digestive hormones. It may also increase glucose tolerance and reduce blood sugar levels.

Lower blood pressure

This natural sweetener may also help lower your blood pressure. A study was published in the British Journal of Clinical Pharmacology on the effects of stevioside (a component of stevia) on hypertension (high blood pressure). One hundred and six patients with hypertension either received 250 mg of stevioside three times daily or a placebo.

After three months of treatment, the researchers observed a decrease in both systolic (active heart) and diastolic (resting heart) blood pressure. This decrease continued for a full year. The researchers concluded that stevia is an effective, safe and well-tolerated treatment for high blood pressure.