

Sweet Surrender

What are the differences between ‘sugar-free’ and ‘no added sugar’ products? Do the manufacturers actually omit sugar from their products? Are these foods able to help with my blood sugar control? Lyvia Lai, dietitian, National Healthcare Group Polyclinics, unwraps the answer.

One of the many advantages of living in cosmopolitan Singapore is that we are surrounded by food. Whether it is cooked or packaged, food is so readily accessible not only locally, but also globally. In recent years, we have seen an increase in the number of ‘sugar-free’, ‘no added sugars’ or ‘suitable for diabetics’ foods going on sale in the market.

While ‘sugar-free’ products do not have any added glucose (the sugar that can affect your blood sugar levels), they do contain calories (energy), carbohydrates and, depending on the product, may even contain fats. Instead of glucose, some products will have fructose (another type of sugar that contains calories), alcohol sugars or artificial sweeteners instead. ‘No added sugar’ products do not have any added sugars either but they are usually found in products with natural sugars such as juices and jams.

Are sugar-free confectionaries such as cookies, cakes and chocolates healthier? Most of these

confectionaries are not so different from their regular counterparts; the amount of fat used may be the same, e.g. butter, vegetable fat, cocoa butter, etc.

So, is it safe for people with diabetes to consume sugar-free confectionaries? Yes, in moderation – that is only small amounts at a time and only occasionally. ‘Sugar-free’ does not mean that these products are entirely free from calories or fat. Besides watching out for ‘total sugars’ found in the product, do keep a lookout for the ‘total carbohydrates’.

What about ‘sugar-free’ or ‘diet’ jams? Are they better alternatives to your regular jams? Even though ‘sugar-free’ or ‘diet’ jams may not have added sugars, they still contain natural sugars and carbohydrates. However, they are generally lower in calories and sugars and carbohydrates as manufacturers may add alcohol sugars or artificial sweeteners. When used in small amounts, they can be your healthy alternative for spreads.

