What are sugar substitutes?
Sugar substitutes are chemical or natural substances that sweeten food and drinks, but are low in calories, or have no calories. These substances are significantly sweeter than sugar, so lower levels can provide the same level of sweetness.

Why are sugar substitutes added to food and drinks?
Sugar substitutes provide sweetness to food, but add fewer calories than sugar, which is helpful for people who are dieting, or for those who have diabetes and have to be careful about their sugar intake. Foods and beverages using sugar substitutes can often be identified by terms such as “light,” “reduced calorie” or “sugar-free.”

What sugar substitutes are available in the United States?
The following sugar substitutes have been approved by the FDA in the United States:
- Aspartame, which is also known by the brand names Equal and Nutrasweet
- Acesulfame K, which is also known as Sunett and Sweet One
- Saccharin, which is also known as Sweet ‘N Low and Sweet Twin
- Sucralose, which is also known as Splenda
- Stevia, which is also known as PureVia, Truvia and SweetLeaf Sweetener
- Sugar alcohols, which include sorbitol, xylitol and maltitol

I’ve heard that sugar substitutes can cause cancer or other health problems. Is that true?
Studies in laboratory rats during the early 1970s linked saccharin with the development of bladder cancer. However, studies that examine how a substance works in the human body have shown that these results apply only to rats. Human studies have shown no consistent evidence that saccharin is associated with bladder cancer, prompting the National Cancer Institute to state that there is no proof that sugar substitutes cause cancer in humans.

Numerous studies have been conducted on the sugar substitutes that are approved for use in the United States, and they have shown the no- and low-calorie sweeteners to be safe when used in moderation. One exception is for people who have phenylketonuria (PKU). People who have PKU are unable to metabolize aspartame, and should avoid this substitute.

How can I tell if a food or drink contains a sugar substitute?
Check the ingredient list for the names of sugar substitutes listed above.

How much sugar substitutes should be in my diet?
Except what you add yourself, it may be difficult to know exactly how much of a sugar substitute is in a food or beverage. The Acceptable Daily Intakes for sugar substitutes differ, but all have been shown to be safe when used in moderation, and diet should be centered on healthy options, such as fresh fruits and vegetables.

I’m pregnant. Are sugar substitutes safe for me?
The American Academy of Pediatrics has determined that aspartame is safe for pregnant women and their developing babies. There is also good evidence that acesulfame K, sugar alcohols and sucralose are safe for pregnant women when used in small amounts. Less research has been conducted on the safety of saccharin and stevia in pregnant women.