

## **PENNY SAVER NEWS**

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BY: Mary A. Keith, Ph.D., L.D.  
Food, Nutrition and Health Agent

### Erythritol - New Sweetener, or Old Hand?

Some recipes came through my email recently that called for erythritol. That's not a common find in an ingredient list! But it is showing up more frequently in diet products in the market, so you might see it on those lists. And there are a few of the diet sweeteners in the grocery store that use it. So, in case you're interested, here's a run-down on erythritol.

It is not an artificial sweetener, and it's not a new one. It is found naturally in various fruits including pears and cantaloupes, and it is made when foods are fermented. Now that fermented foods are getting so popular we're probably eating more than we ever have without knowing it.

It is a sugar alcohol. The -ol gives that away. Common sugar alcohols are sorbitol, mannitol or xylitol. Sugar alcohols don't contain any alcohol. They are based on sugars, but have a couple of extra hydrogens tacked on to their oxygens. In this case, the basic sugar is erythrose, also a natural sugar from fruits. It tastes sweet, and like other sugar alcohols also has a cooling effect in your mouth, the kind of cool you feel with mint or mint-flavored gum and candy. It's a smaller sugar than glucose or sucrose, and we can naturally use it. But because of those extra hydrogens, we don't use it very well. Most sugar alcohols have about half the calories of sugar. That's why they are used in low-cal and diet foods.

But, most sugar alcohols have an unfortunate side effect if we eat too much of them. Because we do not absorb them like sugar, they keep going through our intestines. As they go they pull water into the intestines too. We feel the effects of that collected water as it goes out - as diarrhea. Now if we eat just a little sugar alcohol there's no problem. But foods that contain more than 5 g in a serving must show how much in the Nutrition Facts box on the label. If you see that, limit your portions.

However, erythritol is different. It does not cause these side effects! It is absorbed but not used. Our kidneys filter it out of the blood, and over 90% of it comes out as urine. It goes in one end and out the other, with no diarrhea involved.

Less than 10% of it is used as calories, so it is very useful in low calorie foods. If we use artificial sweeteners to make cookies, they're tiny because all the sugar is missing. Erythritol is

bulkier, so the cookies are bigger. It's especially good in foods that taste good with a bit of mint, because of its own minty cooling. And since it doesn't attract water like the other sugar alcohols it doesn't change the texture of the foods it's used in. Many of the artificial sweeteners also pull moisture out of the foods they're in, so we end up with dry, crumbly cookies or muffins. Erythritol won't do that.

Another type of product that erythritol is being used in are the 'vitamin waters'. It adds sweetness, and dissolves well so it doesn't make them cloudy. No one minds if there's a touch of minty flavor to their water. There seems to be concern if they're safe because of the erythritol. They are. But no one seems to wonder whether we need vitamin waters at all, or flavored vitamin water, or diet vitamin water. Oh well. At least they're better than sweetened sodas.

You can find it in sweetener mixtures in the grocery store, things like Truvia® with Erythritol. It's also sold under the names of Swerve®, Zerosé®, and maybe more. There are plenty of on-line sites ready to sell you the pure form too if you want to try it.

Blueberries are in the stores all ready, so here's a sweet fruity dessert for you. If you want to use regular sugar, use just 1/3 of a cup. It will still be delicious.

#### Blueberry Crisp

½ cup dry quick or regular oats	½ cup whole wheat flour
6 Tbsp cold margarine, in cubes	1 tsp sugar or Erythritol
4 cups washed blueberries	½ C Erythritol
1 tsp cinnamon	1/8 tsp ground nutmeg
1 Tbsp lemon juice	

Preheat oven to 350° F. Blend the oatmeal, flour, butter and 1 tsp sugar/sweetener in a food processor until crumbly. Put 2/3 of the mixture in an 8 or 9 inch baking dish. Combine berries and rest of ingredients and pour into baking dish. Sprinkle the rest of the oatmeal mixture on top. Bake for 45 minutes until golden on top and fruit is soft. Top with fat free vanilla yogurt, or ice cream.

Serves 8.

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