

Alternative Sweeteners

The market is loaded with numerous alternative sweeteners touted to have low glycemic indexes and be healthy substitutes for sugar. But beware. Most of these highly processed morsels of sweetness are very damaging to the gut. Erythritol, sorbitol, and xylitol are among the most popular.

All three, erythritol, sorbitol, and xylitol, are sugar alcohols. These do contain some calories but fewer calories than sugar and natural sweeteners such as honey and maple syrup. Erythritol is derived from corn sugar and is most often from GMO (genetically modified organism) corn. Sorbitol, a slow metabolizing alcohol sugar, is made from fruits, corn, and seaweed. Xylitol is a carbohydrate found in the birch tree. It is also classified as a sugar alcohol and used as an additive. It is highly refined in order to get it into the state in which it is consumed.

Sugar alcohols are largely indigestible, which is why they can create problems in the gut. People with gut disorders should avoid erythritol, sorbitol, and xylitol. These refined sweeteners are not allowed while on the GAPS Diet, and ideally any gut healing protocol, as they have been found to disrupt the gut lining. When over-consumed, sugar alcohols can cause diarrhea, bloating, and gas in many people.

According to WebMD.com, “there is not enough information to confirm xylitol's safety in pregnant and breastfeeding women, so they should not use it for medicinal purposes. Although some animal studies have shown tumor growth resulting from high doses of xylitol over long periods, more research is needed.” The site goes on to say that “if you are a dog owner, be aware that xylitol can be toxic to dogs, even in small amounts.”

Keep in mind that while these refined, highly processed sweeteners have received GRAS (generally recognized as safe) status from the Food & Drug Administration (FDA), no rigorous, long-term studies have been performed. Our recommendation is that all refined food products are best avoided. While on the GAPS Diet, limit your sweeteners to fresh fruit, raw honey, and whole leaf stevia in very small amounts.