

What are sugar free sweets made with?

From the sweeties.net wiki

Sugar free sweets still taste sweet, so something has to take the place of sugar. In most of them, that something is a sugar alcohol, often helped along by a tiny amount of an intense sweetener.

Sugar alcohols

Sugar alcohols, also called polyols, are sweet substances usually made from sugars. Despite the name, they contain no alcohol of the drinking kind and cannot make you drunk. They are used in place of sugar because they give sweets their bulk and texture as well as sweetness. Ones you may see on a sweet label include:

- **Maltitol**, which has 75 to 90 per cent of the sweetness of sugar and behaves much like it, except that it does not brown
- **Sorbitol**, E420, about half as sweet as sugar
- **Isomalt**, used for its sugar like properties, especially in sugar free boiled sweets and lozenges
- **Xylitol**, E967, common in sugar free chewing gum
- **Erythritol**, which is made by fermenting sugars

As a group, sugar alcohols are less sweet than sugar and have a little less energy. On European style labels, which Britain still uses, they are all counted at 2.4 kilocalories per gram, compared with about 3.9 for table sugar. Some also give a cool feeling in the mouth when they are concentrated, as in sugar free boiled sweets and gum, because they absorb heat as they dissolve.

Intense sweeteners

Because most sugar alcohols are not as sweet as sugar, they are often mixed with a high intensity sweetener. Sugar free boiled sweets made with isomalt, for example, are often sweetened further with aspartame, sucralose, saccharin or a sugar alcohol such as xylitol. Acesulfame potassium, or acesulfame K, is about 200 times sweeter than sugar and is often blended with aspartame or sucralose, because each masks the other's aftertaste. Stevia, from a plant, is another option.

Intense sweeteners have had their controversies. In July 2023 the International Agency for Research on Cancer classed aspartame as possibly carcinogenic, based on what it called limited evidence, while its lead investigator said this was more a call for further research than a statement of a known hazard. Regulators, including the European Food Safety Authority and the US Food and Drug Administration, have concluded that aspartame is safe within the acceptable daily intake. The same year, the World Health Organization advised against using non sugar sweeteners to control body weight.

What the label has to say

Under UK food labelling law, sugar free sweets have to carry some extra information.

- **With sweetener.** A food containing sweeteners must say with sweetener, or with sugar and sweetener, next to its name.
- **Laxative warning.** A food with more than 10 per cent added polyols must say that excessive consumption may produce laxative effects: see [why do sugar free sweets carry a laxative warning?](#)
- **Phenylalanine.** A food with aspartame must say it contains a source of phenylalanine, which matters to people with the rare inherited condition phenylketonuria.

Teeth and blood sugar

Sugar alcohols are not fed on by the bacteria in your mouth, so they do not contribute to tooth decay, and xylitol may even help to deter it. They are also absorbed more slowly and less completely than sugar, so they have less effect on blood sugar, which is why they are popular with people with diabetes and people on low carbohydrate diets.

Two important warnings

Sugar alcohols can upset your stomach if you eat too many, which is the reason for the laxative warning.

And xylitol is poisonous to dogs. The PDSA warns it is extremely harmful and can be fatal, so keep sugar free sweets and gum well away from pets: see [can dogs eat sweets?](#)

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