

Aspartame, the Sweet Deception: Medical Student's Story on Diet Soda

By Simon Yu, MD and Aaron Lee

I have the privilege of teaching third year medical students from Washington University's School of Medicine. One student at a time spends one month with me in my private practice. They have the opportunity to observe and learn an integrated approach to medicine that combines Internal medicine with Alternative Medicine.

In my recent preceptorship, I saw my medical student drinking diet soda. Most diet sodas contain aspartame. So I gave him the assignment of investigating potential dangers of aspartame. I instructed him to write as if he was giving a lecture to his patients about the dangers of aspartame.

The following is Aaron Lee's story on aspartame.

When I started my month with Dr. Yu, I came into a world of confusion. Dr. Yu revealed to me ideas and a real-world understanding of medicine, based on actual results, which challenged many concepts I had learned in medical school. Many of the ideas were contrary to the paradigms and standards of medicine that had been imprinted into my mind.

The weeks that followed challenged the reality of what I had been taught to be "Truth." It was not long before my eyes were opened to the harsh reality of a modern medicine driven almost exclusively by the monetary gain of the pharmaceutical companies.

Aspartame, also known as Nutrasweet, Candrelle, or Equal, was serendipitously discovered in 1965 by James Schlatter, a chemist working for G.D. Searle & Company. In 1981, Arthur Hull Hayes, an FDA (Food and Drug Administration) commissioner, approved aspartame for use in dry goods. In 1983 the FDA further approved aspartame for use in carbonated beverages.

In 1993, the FDA approved it for use in other beverages, baked goods, and confections. In 1996, the FDA removed all restrictions from aspartame allowing it to be used in all foods. ***These approvals came even in the face of evidence that aspartame may have negative effects on health.***

Since its categorical approval, ***aspartame has been blamed for causing up to 92 different symptoms***, including, most commonly, headaches, dizziness, changes in mood, and nausea. While these complaints have been filed with the FDA, no formal investigation outside of surveys has taken place. In addition, 10% of aspartame by weight is broken down to methanol and formaldehyde, both of which are chemicals known to have adverse effects on the human body.

A study done in 1998 looked at the distribution of radio-labeled aspartame in mice. It found parts of aspartame bound to the DNA and protein in the liver, kidney, and brain. Another part of aspartame, phenylalanine is a neurotransmitter in the brain. There are speculations as to whether the sudden increase in the blood level of this neurotransmitter causes adverse effects.

Perhaps more disturbing than the above is the controversy over whether aspartame causes cancer. A seven year study published in 2005 followed 1800 rats with varying levels of aspartame modeled after human consumption. This study found increased levels of lymphomas, leukemias, peripheral nerve tumors and kidney cancers.

In addition, there are basic science studies that support the idea aspartame may cause cancer. In one experiment with mice, aspartame was found to increase levels of cancer genes in the bone marrow and the kidney. These are the same locations as the first study.

Why, then, is there so much controversy over the safety of aspartame? For every study, there are many more studies “disproving” the dangers of aspartame. Indeed, the medical literature seems filled with studies asserting the safety of aspartame. It is no wonder that the medical community seems to have reached a consensus that aspartame is not dangerous.

However, a review of the literature found that 100% of the studies funded by the aspartame industry asserted the safety of aspartame. However, **92% of the independently funded studies found adverse reactions with aspartame!** This large discrepancy raises great suspicion on the validity of the industry-funded studies and whether those studies had been tainted by financial incentives.

As medical research is conducted, it is imperative to consider the financial incentives and ties of the researchers. One must also discern the influences and underlying motives of the driving forces of the industry. The lies surrounding aspartame are a clear example of the “bias” dangers within the current medical system and government approvals.

While medical doctors cannot be excused for their lack of objectivity, I know that as I continue in my medical training I will not let rose-tinted glasses color my perception of reality. I will educate those around me, doctors and patients alike.

Dr. Simon Yu, M.D. is a Board Certified Internist. He practices Internal Medicine with an emphasis on Alternative Medicine to use the best each has to offer. For more articles and information about alternative medicine as well as patient success stories visit his web site at www.preventionandhealing.com or call Prevention and Healing, Inc., 314-432-7802. You can also attend a free monthly presentation and discussion by Dr. Yu on Alternative Medicine at his office on the second Tuesday each month at 6:30 pm. Please call to verify the date and reserve your space.



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