

NATURAL SWEETENERS

XYLITOL

This is the most common sugar alcohol. It is often used in sugar-free chewing gum and mints, as well as toothpaste, as it has a mint flavour. It has about 40 per cent fewer calories than regular sugar.



ERYTHRITOL

With 70 per cent of the sweetness of sugar, but only 5 per cent of the calories, erythritol is another popular sweetener. It is processed by fermenting the glucose in corn starch.

SORBITOL

Sorbitol is 60 per cent as sweet as sugar, and has about 60 per cent of the calories. It is commonly used in sugar-free food and drinks, but can cause digestive upsets.

MALTITOL

Very similar in taste to regular sugar, maltitol is processed from the sugar maltose. It is 90 per cent as sweet as sugar, with just half the calories.

STEVIA

Made from the leaves of the stevia plant, stevia is a natural, sugar-free alternative. It doesn't raise blood sugar, and it has some anti-inflammatory compounds. It is non-caloric, so good for those who are trying to cut their calories.

"Stevia is not a sugar, it's an intense sweetener, and it's been around for quite a long time in the southern Americas in particular," Barclay says. "But what we're having in our food supply is a highly refined extract of it. Usually it's mixed with other sweeteners, because it has a bit of a liquorice aftertaste for a lot of people. My concern with stevia is people think it's ground up stevia leaves, and it's far from it. It is a highly refined extract. I think the health halo around stevia is probably not warranted."

LO HAN GUO/MONKFUIT

Lo Han Guo has been used as a natural sweetener and healing remedy for many years in China, where it is known as "longevity fruit" or "Buddha fruit". It is much sweeter than sugar, with high concentrations of fructose and glucose, but the sweetness comes from glycosides in the flesh of the fruit, which is said to be antioxidant-rich.

It is now becoming more mainstream in the west. Japanese chef Nobu Matsuhisa recently told SBS he plans to use it widely in his Nobu restaurants around the world. "There is a fruit grown in Asia called the monkfruit, which is a natural sweetener that has no calories," he says. But Barclay urges some caution: "It's a highly refined extract that is intensely sweetened."

Adapted from <https://www.sbs.com.au/food/explainer/what-you-need-know-about-different-types-sugar>