

Are You Buying Stevia or Something Else?

Stevia is a zero calorie sweetener that comes from a herbaceous plant, *Stevia rebaudiana*, a relative of the sunflower that is native to South America. It has been used as a sweetener and a medicine by the Guaraní people of Brazil and Paraguay for more than 1,500 years.

First, we heard this natural sweetener that is from 200 times to 400 times sweeter than sugar, has no calories, and doesn't raise glucose levels in the blood. Next, we heard possible health benefits, especially for diabetics. It may even be a wonderful antioxidant that lowers cholesterol, lowers blood pressure, and helps fight cancer. But is the stevia you are buying at the grocery store the same sweetener with these health benefits?

Stevia leaves can be dehydrated and crushed to make a whole food sweetener with definite health benefits including an array of antioxidants. But, as is often the case, this healthy food is probably not what you are buying. Stevia's sweetness comes from glycosides contained in the leaves. The two primary glycosides are stevioside and rebaudioside (though there are as many as seven). Stevioside has an aftertaste some experience as bitter while others say it tastes like licorice. Rebaudioside is sweeter without an aftertaste. When you buy stevia, you may be buying stevia extract that is just rebaudioside. And stevia may not be the only ingredient. Take Truvia for example.

Truvia's lists 3 ingredients on their label: erythritol, stevia leaf extract, and natural flavors. Erythritol is a sugar alcohol, a calorie-free sugar substitute made from sugar that has been known to cause headaches, diarrhea, and stomach upset when large amounts are ingested. For some people, a

regular size portion will cause this reaction. The third ingredient is natural flavors. That could be anything, even aspartame or MSG.

Dr. Axe writes, "According to the United States patent for the Coca-Cola Company, Truvia goes through a 42 step process to make this processed sweetener. First, the rebaudioside is extracted from the stevia leaf then, chemical solvents are added including acetonitrile which is toxic to the liver and is a carcinogen. They then add in a GMO corn derivative in erythritol."

And yet, when most people buy Truvia, they believe they are buying stevia.

Teas, extracts, and tinctures made with high-quality, whole-leaf stevia, on the other hand, contain up to seven sweet compounds (glycosides) and an array of antioxidants.

Quality Stevia

Green leaf stevia, made by crushing dried stevia leaves into powder, is the least processed. It is 30-40 times sweeter than sugar (rather than 200-400 times) and is a little bitter by comparison to the processed varieties. Dr. Axe recommends the brands Sweet Leaf Stevia and Organic Traditions.

If you want to ensure you are getting the best possible stevia, grow your own! See the link below to Mother Earth News and a great article on growing stevia. They even tell you how to make extract, which is very simple. Just add $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of lightly crushed leaves to 1 cup of almost boiling water and steep it for 40 minutes. Strain and refrigerate. What could be easier?

Recommended Reading:

- *Healthy Sugar Alternatives & More*
- *Candida, Gut Flora, Allergies, and Disease*

- *Heal Cavities, Gum Disease, Naturally with Organic Oral Care – Toothpaste recipes included*
- *How to Cure Lyme Disease, and Virtually Any Other Bacterial Infection, Naturally*
- *How to Optimize Curcumin Absorption – With Golden Milk Tea Recipe*

Sources:

- *All About Growing the Stevia Plant – Mother Earth News*
- *Stevia Side Effects: Good or Bad? – Dr. Axe Food Is Medicine*
- *Stevia Dangers – Stevia.net*
- *History of Use – Stevia.net*
- *The Benefits and Risks of Erythritol as a Sweetener – Livestrong*