

# The new sweeteners

They're natural and certainly sweet, but are they safe? We've got the skinny.

By Amy Paturel, MS, MPH



## Agave

**What it is:** Extracted from the Mexican agave plant, this sweetener gives tequila its smooth finish. Agave nectar is primarily fructose, so it's absorbed more slowly into the bloodstream than table sugar is. It's also sweeter than sugar, so you need less.

**Where to find it:** Online ([www.blueagavenectar.com](http://www.blueagavenectar.com)) as a stand-alone sweetener, in syrup form. It's showing up more in beverages, as well as in dressings from Melissa's Good Life Food products ([www.melissas.com](http://www.melissas.com)), and Dr. Kracker crackers ([www.drkracker.com](http://www.drkracker.com)).

**How it tastes:** Similar to maple syrup—very sweet.

**How safe it is:** No problems have been found. But studies are limited, so moderation is smart.

## Whey Low

**What it is:** A combination of three natural sugars: lactose, fructose, and sucrose. They compete for absorption in the bloodstream, so only a fourth of the calories are absorbed.

**Where to find it:** At health-food stores and some grocers nationwide and online ([www.wheylow.com](http://www.wheylow.com)). It's sold in packets and in granular, powdered, and even brown sugar-style forms.

**How it tastes:** Like regular sugar.

**How safe it is:** It's not approved by the Food and Drug Administration, but each of the ingredients are, therefore Whey Low is "generally regarded as safe" (or GRAS). Its low glycemic index means it won't make blood sugar soar. Use it in moderation.

## Stevia

**What it is:** An extract from a South American shrub, calorie-free stevia is 300 times sweeter than sugar.

**Where to find it:** It's not yet FDA-approved for use in foods, but it's available as a "supplement" in health-food and vitamin stores. It comes in liquid form, small green packets, and even tablets for drinks.

**How it tastes:** Sweet, but with a metallic aftertaste.

**How safe it is:** It appears to be safe in humans, but high doses have caused fertility and metabolic problems in animals, and lab studies have linked it to genetic mutations that may lead to cancer. Some studies show that stevia can lower blood sugar, and help control your blood pressure.

## Lo Han

**What it is:** A member of the cucumber and squash family, it's a fruit grown in China. It's about 250 times sweeter than sugar due to its mogrosides, a natural chemical used for centuries in China to treat congestion, colds, and sore throat.

**Where to find it:** In products such as SlimSweet, Sweet & Slender, and Lo Han Sweet. You can buy it online ([www.iherb.com](http://www.iherb.com)) and in most health-food stores, in both powder and liquid forms.

**How it tastes:** Sweet, but also very metallic and bitter.

**How safe it is:** It's not FDA-approved and there are no studies on it so far. And you may experience some gastrointestinal distress with increasing use.