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# FITNESS

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# AFQ & A

BY MATT BRZYCKI

## How safe are nonnutritive sweeteners?

Currently, there are seven nonnutritive sweeteners approved by the Food and Drug Administration for use in the United States: acesulfame K, aspartame, Luo Han Guo fruit extract, neotame, saccharin, stevia and sucralose. Several others are approved for use in other countries but not the U.S.

As the name suggests, nonnutritive sweeteners contain little or no carbohydrates and, thus, little or no calories. Nonnutritive sweeteners are anywhere from 150 to 13,000 times as sweet as sucrose (table sugar).

Perhaps the biggest concern with nonnutritive sweeteners is the risk of cancer. But according to the National Cancer Institute, there's no clear evidence that nonnutritive sweeteners are associated with cancer in humans. And, in general, an extensive review of the scientific literature by the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics—formerly the American Dietetic Association—found that all of the nonnutritive sweeteners approved for use in the U.S. have been tested and determined to be safe when consumed in recommended amounts.

Bottom line: Nonnutritive sweeteners can be safely used to enhance the sweetness of foods and beverages without adding calories.

## Does Pilates increase muscular symmetry?

Pilates continues to be a popular form of exercise with a variety of spin-offs. And there's a growing body of research that has investigated its effectiveness.

In one recent study, nine women (average age 35.7 at baseline) did a Pilates program twice a week for 36 weeks.

The program included standard exercises that were done on a mat as well as with a reformer. Each session lasted 55 minutes and had groups of no more than four participants.

The researchers determined the cross-sectional area and volume of the subjects' abdominals (the rectus abdominis, obliques and transversus abdominis) with Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI). They also measured the subjects' body composition using dual-energy X-ray absorptiometry (DEXA).

After nearly nine months of Pilates, there were no significant changes in the percentage of body fat. However, Pilates improved the symmetry—here, the side-to-side differences—of the obliques and transversus abdominis (which had been asymmetrical before training).

So, based on the findings of this study, it would seem that Pilates can correct asymmetry of several abdominal muscles including those that are involved in lateral flexion and rotation of the spine.

**MATT BRZYCKI** is the Assistant Director of Campus Recreation, Fitness at Princeton University. He has more than 30 years of experience at the collegiate level and has authored, co-authored and edited 17 books.

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