

Artificial sweeteners are a bitter sweet reality

For Huib van Bockel, CEO and founder of TENZING Natural Energy, the latest WHO report confirms what he has been following for years - that artificial sweeteners should never have been created as an alternative to sugar.

Temps de lecture : minute

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This isn't our first warning from WHO. We already know some effects - blood sugar spikes, increased prevalence of type two diabetes, weight gain. In May this year another study concluded that artificial sweeteners - including 'natural' sweeteners like Stevia - shouldn't be used to control calories and lose weight. And yet, businesses continue to create sweetener-filled products with no care of the adverse side effects including the latest study showing that they cause cancer.

When I was creating the recipe for TENZING, that's when I discovered that each and every energy drink recipe out there contained some kind of artificial sweetener with many also containing a high level of sugar too. At that point I knew I had to reimagine the energy drink.

I spoke to four potential production partners to see how I could blend the natural ingredients I wanted to use whilst removing about 60% of the sugar - the first thing they said was "What do you want to replace that with? Aspartame, Stevia, Sucralose...?" I said, "Nothing."



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Three parties dropped me immediately, they said it wasn't commercially viable, it wouldn't sell. One partner shared my vision and now we're the 3rd most popular energy drink in London grocery*.

Since that question, "What do you want to replace the sugar with?", I've watched the space closely, read every piece of research that comes out on sweeteners and become even more passionate about sharing damning research around the use of sweeteners.

The same conclusion occurs time and again: sweeteners don't help you control calories or lose weight, and they have adverse effects.

So why is it still a multi-billion pound business? Well, the answer lies in the question. Because it is a multi-billion pound business. Think of all the

global sales of Coke Zero, Monster Ultra, Pepsi Max. And that's just the soft drinks. I suspect 100's of billions of turnover across the whole food and drink industry depends on these artificial sweeteners.

Although I hoped that new brand launches nowadays would consider the latest science, unfortunately that is not the case. Prime is a *prime* example that the decade old thinking has not changed. They went down the lazy, cheap route and chucked in not one, but two artificial sweeteners: sucralose and acesulfame.

When there's 100's of billions of turnover at stake, you can count on 10's of billions of marketing, lobby groups, sponsored professors and dedicated associations to spread misinformation to soften the research against them.

Take WHO's latest announcement: when clicking on a link to an article written by a leading British publication, there was an advert for an energy drink filled with aspartame nestled right next to the headline warning against this exact kind of product - I wish I was joking.

What followed the announcement was comments from the Secretary General of the International Sweeteners Association - an organisation built solely to protect the billion pound industry.

This is swiftly followed by the lobby groups, claiming that banning artificial sweeteners could mislead the public into consuming more sugar rather than choosing safe no- and low-sugar options. Not a surprising narrative, when the salaries of these spokespeople are paid for by the sweeteners.

And the cherry on top: the expert professor is wheeled out. This time it was Professor Kevin McConway - a quick Google shows his pro-sweetener comments in at least four other reports. He is always at hand to say the same thing: *"it's hard to really conclude anything here."*

Well actually, there is one thing we can conclude: the lobby to keep these artificial sweeteners firmly in our drinks is real which means we have ourselves a David vs Goliath battle. The big dogs fighting to keep them in, TENZING and a handful of other forward-thinking brands fighting to keep them out. Luckily science, and the new generation, are rooting for David.

Huib van Bockel, is the CEO and founder of TENZING Natural Energy.