



## “Oh How Sweet It Is”

*Dr. Charles Shaffer*

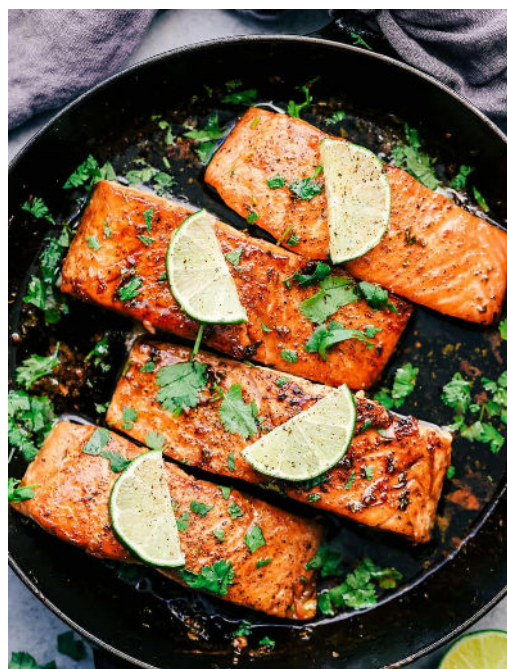
Many years ago in the 50s and 60s there was a show titled “The Honeymooners” starring Jackie Gleason. Jackie would come out on stage and say “oh how sweet it is”.

Recently, aspartame has been reported in many news outlets because it has been linked to strokes. The Weigh Station has a firm belief against aspartame and prohibits the sugar in the program. The FDA states that aspartame is 200 times sweeter than sugar. There have been many studies conducted but none have reached a definite consensus as to whether or not aspartame is bad for you. However, the ingredients that make up aspartame are aspartic acid and phenylalanine. These are naturally occurring amino acids. Aspartic acid is produced by your body and phenylalanine is an essential amino acid that an individual gets from their food.

When your body processes aspartame, part of it is broken down into methanol which is a simple alcohol. Ingestion of fruit, fruit juice, fermented beverages, and some vegetables contain or result in the production of methanol. In 2014, a study done by the FDA showed aspartame was the largest source of methanol in the American diet.

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*Photos courtesy of The Recipe Critic*

Methanol is also toxic in large quantities and may be concerning at small amounts when combined with free methanol because of its enhanced absorption.

Free methanol exists in some foods and is created from aspartame when it is heated. When consumed regularly it poses a problem because it breaks down into what is known as formaldehyde. Formaldehyde is a well-known carcinogen and neurotoxin to the body. However, the United Kingdom states aspartame, especially in children, did not show any abnormalities.

Recently, the Alternative Medicine Review, sponsored by Dr. Alan, has found that aspartame in commercial products and hot beverages is “said to undergo chemical changes” and should be considered a potential trigger for seizures for cases that are difficult to manage. Some physicians believe aspartame is a contributor to seizure disorders however it has not been proven on a large scale.

While aspartame is approved by the FDA many consumer advocacy groups suggest it should be removed from the American diet. These groups work in the public’s interest and cite numerous studies when championing against aspartame. As stated before, aspartame is 200 times sweeter than sugar so only a small amount is needed to give food or beverages a mild flavor.

A diet soda contains 185 mg of aspartame. To exceed the FDA’s recommended amount, a person who weighs 200 pounds would have to ingest 22 cans of soda. However, individuals with phenylketonuria and those who are taking medications for schizophrenia should avoid the use of aspartame.

Tardive dyskinesia is thought to be a side effect of schizophrenia medications and aspartame may precipitate the uncontrolled movements of tardive dyskinesia. Recent articles in Medscape have pointed towards the linkage of aspartame and headaches, depression, dizziness, weight gain, birth defects, multiple sclerosis, and seizure disorders. Once again, there is also new evidence between strokes and diet drinks.

Longterm research is needed in order to confirm whether or not these connections with ailments and aspartame should be considered valid and accepted by everyone in the medical community. Researchers report an increased risk of symptoms or disease acceleration while others report no adverse outcome.

Although aspartame has both pros and cons, when considering diabetes and obesity it is important to keep in mind that individuals who are diagnosed with diabetes may benefit from artificial sweeteners. However, it was observed that diabetics using aspartame and other sweeteners had a tendency to gravitate toward sweet products and also had difficulty in maintaining their hemoglobin A1c. The controversy over aspartame will continue for many more years. The Weigh Station suggests Stevia as a replacement and has not seen any adverse effects.

I hope this gives insight to individuals regarding aspartame. If you have any further questions or concerns, do not hesitate to contact us. As always, if we have any new information we will be sure to share it.

Blessings,  
Chuck Shaffer MD

# The Recipe of the Month

## *Lemon-Lime Salmon with Veggie*

### *Sauté*

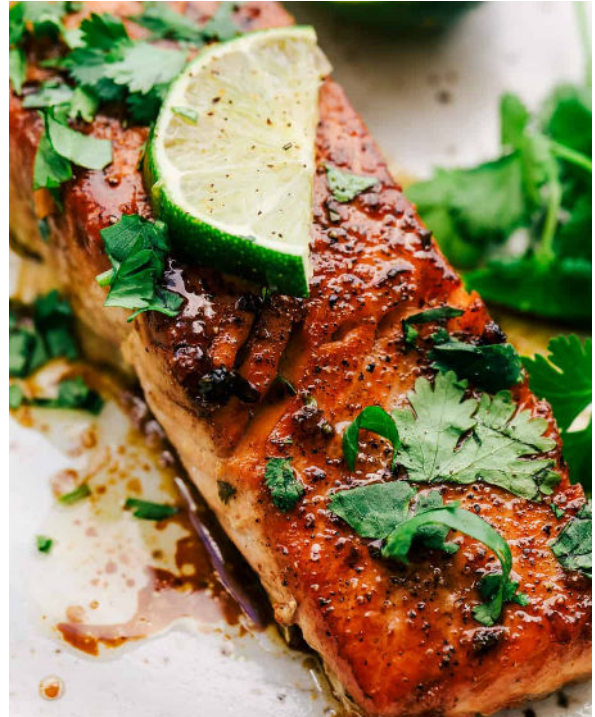
- 6 salmon fillets (4 oz each)
- 1/4 C lemon juice (ok since this will yield less than 1 tbsp per serving)
- 1/4 C lime juice (ok since this will yield less than 1 tbsp per serving)
- 1 tsp seafood seasoning
- 1/4 tsp salt
- 2 medium red peppers, sliced
- 2 medium yellow peppers, sliced
- 1 large red onion, halved and sliced
- 2 tsp olive oil
- 2 C baby Portobello mushrooms, halved
- 2 C fresh asparagus
- 2 tsp dried tarragon

### *Directions*

Place salmon in a 13 inch by 9 inch baking dish, add lemon and lime juices and sprinkle with seafood seasoning and salt. Bake uncovered at 425 F for 10 - 15 minutes.

Meanwhile, in a large non-stick skillet coated with cooking spray, sauté peppers and onion in oil for 3 minutes. Add the mushrooms and asparagus, cook and stir for 3 - 4 minutes longer. Stir in tarragon and serve with salmon.

\*This recipe provides 4 ounces of protein and 2 veggie servings per portion.



**Get  
Cooking!**



Photos courtesy of The Recipe Critic