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Stevia

What is it?

In the quest for healthier, more natural food products, one ingredient has been making waves in the food industry - [stevia](#). This natural high-intensity sweetener is gaining popularity for its unique properties that make it an excellent choice for food manufacturers. As consumers become more health-conscious and demand for natural, low-calorie products increases, stevia is becoming a go-to ingredient for many food manufacturers. Stevia is derived from the leaves of the plant species *Stevia rebaudiana*, native to Brazil and Paraguay. The sweet compounds in stevia leaves, known as steviol glycosides, can be up to 350 times sweeter than sugar. Common steviol glycosides used today include Reb A, Reb D and Reb M.

Where is it used?

Stevia's versatility makes it a valuable addition to a wide range of food and beverage products to replace sugar and create healthier, lower-calorie options.

Beverages: Stevia is widely used in beverages, both hot and cold. You can find it in diet sodas, flavored water, iced tea, fruit juices, and various types of flavored and unsweetened drinks.

Yogurt and Dairy Products: Stevia is often used to sweeten yogurt, kefir, and other dairy products. It provides sweetness without the need for added sugars.

Baked Goods: Stevia can be used in baking to reduce the sugar content of cookies, cakes, muffins, and other baked treats. It is often used in combination with other sweeteners or sugar substitutes to achieve the desired taste and texture.

Fruit spreads and fillings: Stevia can be used as a sweetener in fruit spreads and preserves to reduce the sugar content.

Prepared Foods: Some salad dressings, ketchup, barbecue sauces, and marinades use stevia to add sweetness without the calories associated with sugar.

Sports nutrition: Stevia is used in some low-sugar or sugar-free products, such as energy bars, protein bars and powdered sports beverages.

Desserts: You can find stevia in sugar-free or reduced-sugar dessert options like puddings, gelatin desserts, and ice cream.

Confectionery: stevia can be used in combination with other natural sweeteners such as erythritol in better-for-you gummies and hard candies.

Variations and Selection Criteria

When incorporating stevia into your products, there are several factors to consider:

Sweetness: Stevia is significantly sweeter than sugar, with a potency about 200-300 times that of sugar. This means you'll need far less stevia to achieve the same level of sweetness. It's important to adjust your recipes accordingly to avoid over-sweetening.

Taste Profile: While stevia is sweet, it has a unique taste profile. It has a slower onset and longer duration of sweetness than sugar, and at high concentrations, it may have a slight licorice-like aftertaste. Blendtek has a range of stevia products to help you balance your target taste profile with the best cost-in-use option.

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Functional Properties: Sugar does more than just sweeten. In baking, for example, it contributes to browning, provides structure, and affects the texture of the final product. When replacing sugar with stevia, you may need to use additional ingredients or modify your process to achieve the same results.

Stability: Stevia is heat stable, pH stable, and shelf stable, making it suitable for a variety of applications. However, it's important to consider how it interacts with other ingredients in your product, as this can affect its performance.

Conclusion

In the rapidly evolving landscape of the food industry, stevia stands out as a game-changer. Its unique properties - natural origin, zero calories, and suitability for diabetics - make it a highly attractive ingredient for food manufacturers.

As we strive for healthier and more natural food products, stevia presents an opportunity to meet consumer demands without compromising on taste. Therefore, food manufacturers are encouraged to consider stevia as a key ingredient in their product development. Embracing this natural, healthy sweetener could be a significant step towards creating products that are not only delicious but also contribute to the well-being of consumers. Contact Blendtek to help with development of your next project.

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