OLESTRA

Snacks made with olestra are the alternative to full-fat, full calorie snacking – it’s what helps make great tasting savory snacks for today’s health conscious lifestyles. Since its approval by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in 1996, more than three billion servings of olestra snacks have been sold.

HOW IT WORKS

Olestra is a specific type of sucrose polyester blend made from ingredients found in common foods like vegetable oil and sugar. Olestra has the properties of fat but contributes zero fat, zero calories, zero trans fat and zero cholesterol. Olestra is started from soybean or cottonseed oil and the olestra molecule itself is much larger than a regular fat molecule. The size of the molecule makes it impossible for the body to break it down — similar to the way the body reacts to eating other high fiber foods like apples, corn and bran.

BENEFITS

Helps Control Fat and Calories: Since fat has more calories per gram than protein or carbohydrates, high-fat diets often lead to a greater intake of total calories. Olestra provides a no fat or calories option. For example, in a one-ounce serving of potato chips, olestra eliminates all the fat and slightly more than half the calories.

Provides Great Taste: Olestra looks like fat, fries like fat and tastes like fat. Snacks fried with olestra provide an alternative to full-fat snacks – a practical way to get the taste but still cut fat and calories from the diet.

Can be a Valuable Part of a Healthy Lifestyle: Olestra does not replace the need for dietary moderation and balance. However, olestra is an additional tool to assist people in managing their intake of fat and calories. Studies have shown that products made with olestra are effective in helping people reduce the percentage of calories from fat in their diets, and that olestra snacks can easily be incorporated into a sensible overall healthy eating plan.

Provides More Consumer Choices: Research shows that Americans are continually searching for good-tasting, low-calorie, reduced-fat choices to consume as part of an overall healthy lifestyle. The availability of a variety of low-calorie ingredients, including olestra, allows food manufacturers to choose the most appropriate ingredient, or combination of ingredients, for a given product — the multiple ingredient approach. More ingredients mean more consumer choices.

Health Benefits: Adopting a diet low in fat can help prevent certain types of health problems such as obesity, heart disease, and cancer. When a person consumes more fat and calories than the body requires, obesity can result and from obesity stems such health risks as increased heart disease and the possibility of certain types of cancer.

SAFETY

Olestra is the first FDA-approved fat replacer that is heat-stable at high temperatures, allowing snacks made with olestra to have great taste. In order to receive approval in 1996, Procter & Gamble (P&G) exceeded FDA guidelines and requirements for assessing the safety of a food ingredient. The 22-member Food Advisory Committee evaluated the olestra data and overwhelmingly concluded that olestra is safe for use in savory snacks. In fact, former FDA Commissioner Dr. David Kessler called olestra “one of the most extensively studied food substances to date.” In addition, P&G provided more than 20,000 pages of research data on olestra, as requested by interested parties. Over the years, hundreds of clinical tests have validated the safety of olestra.
Dr. Lawrence Cheskin of Johns Hopkins University, who conducted a recent olestra study (published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*) stated, “If anything, there were more people with regular chips who had complaints. Whatever the explanation is for why people have gastrointestinal complaints, it doesn’t appear to be from the olestra chips.”

**AVAILABILITY & USE**

The FDA approved olestra for use in savory snacks including potato chips, tortilla chips, cheese curls, corn chips and crackers in January 1996. In 2004, the FDA announced the approval for use of olestra in calorie free cooking oil in prepackaged ready-to-eat popcorn, such as microwave popcorn. The FDA reviewed more than 25 years of research, including more than a 150 studies involving thousands of people. Olestra is one of the most thoroughly tested ingredients ever approved by FDA. It is made by P&G and marketed under the brand name Olean®.

Olestra is suitable for a variety of additional products, including french fries, salad dressing, ice cream, margarine and cheese. It also could be used to replace some or all of the fat in shortening and cooking oil used at home or in the preparation of deep-fried commercial products, however before these applications can be initiated, FDA approval will be necessary.

**COMMENTS FROM THE SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY**

Olestra has been reviewed by members of the scientific community. These reviews have led to significant statements in support of olestra. These statements include:

“Olestra is a calorie-free fat substitute that has recently been approved by the Food and Drug Administration. Among the various fat replacers that have been developed, olestra has been the most extensively studied for its effects on fat and energy intake. Combined with exercise and a reduced-calorie diet, fat-modified foods can be an important part of a healthful eating plan.”

*American Diabetes Association*
REFERENCES


