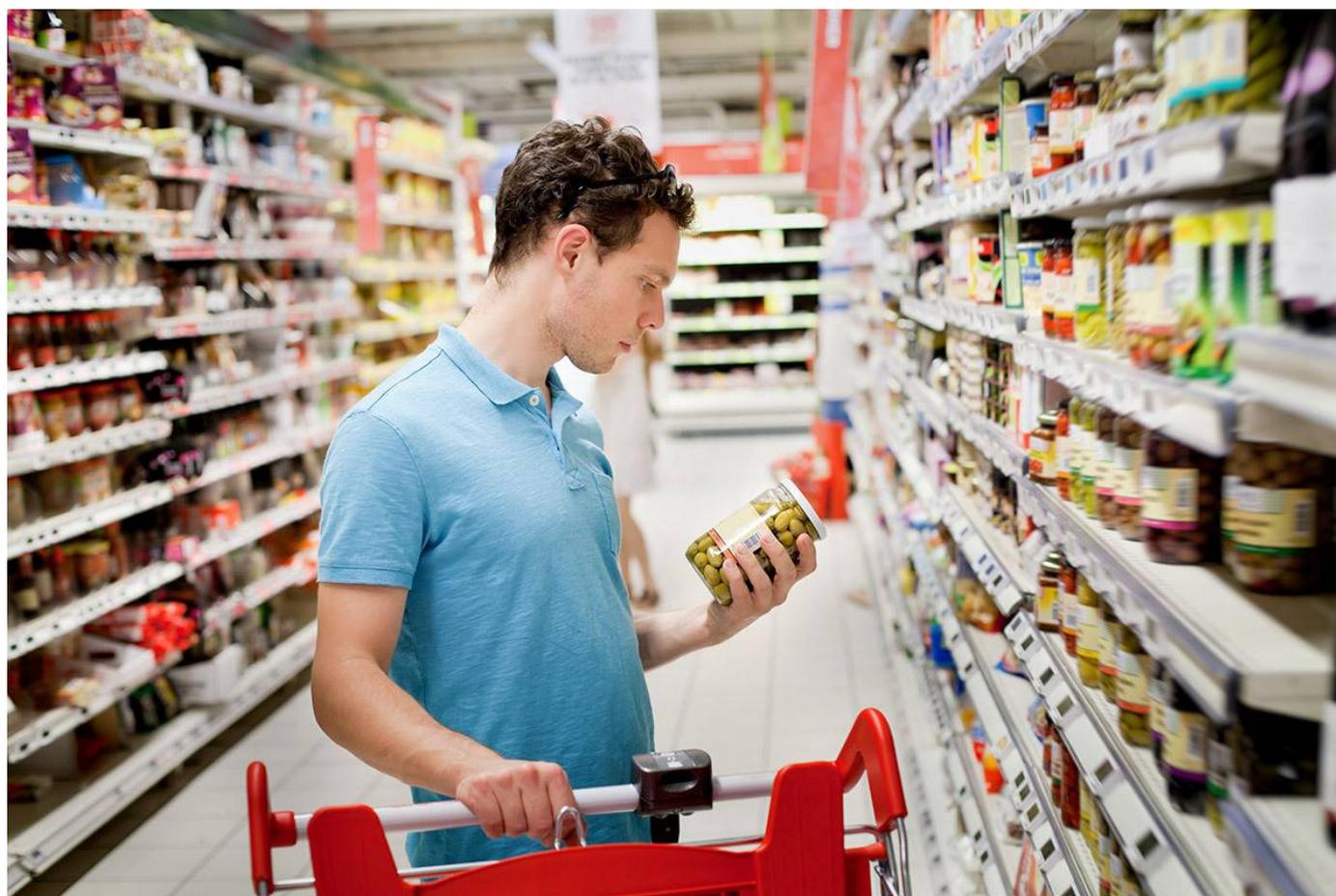


What is Maltodextrin and Why Is It in All of My Food?

An expert dietitian tells us everything we need to know about maltodextrin.

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Maltodextrin is a common ingredient that you most likely have seen on a nutrition label; however, despite its familiarity, most people don't really know what it is. To help clear things up, we asked [Mary Jane Detroyer](#), MS, RDN, CDN, to explain more about maltodextrin, what it is, and whether it's safe to consume.

“[Maltodextrin] is a powdery substance made from [grains](#), wheat, corn, [and] potato, that is added to foods,” Detroyer says. It’s a polysaccharide, a form of [carbohydrate](#), that is artificially produced and used to bind ingredients together, as well as to thicken food. However, unlike other types of carbohydrates, maltodextrin has no nutritional value.

What does maltodextrin do?

Maltodextrin is an inexpensive food additive that increases the shelf life of a product, adds volume to processed foods, and is a sugar substitute. Popular foods and liquids that contain this ingredient include beer, dairy products, salad dressings, and sauces. You’ll also find them in sugar-free foods.

“There are different types of maltodextrins; certain forms are digestible and some are not,” Detroyer informs. Resistant maltodextrin produces the same effects as soluble fiber and are indigestible, while the other type of maltodextrin gives you an energy boost as a simple carbohydrate. You’ll likely find maltodextrin in sports drinks for this reason—athletes tend to consume maltodextrin after a hard workout, to deliver more carbohydrates to the muscles to fuel recovery.

Is it safe to consume?

According to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), maltodextrin is listed as a [GRAS](#) (Generally Recognized as Safe) food additive; however, you still need to be careful. If excessive amounts are consumed, it can still cause health conditions.

This is especially important for athletes who love their post-workout sports drink ritual. “For an athlete that experiences a lot of GI [gastrointestinal] stress on long runs, [in] using these drinks and gels, they may have trouble

digesting them and they should probably avoid the drinks with maltodextrins,” says Detroyer. She recommends that they look for alternative drinks or make their own.

“I think [that] you can get the same effect by drinking juice mixed with water and eating a bagel and a piece of cheese. The difference is [that] the liquid drink is easier to transport and absorbed faster into the muscle,” Detroyer says. So, if you don’t want to give up your post-workout sports drink, then just be careful not to overdo it. Make sure to vary your maltodextrin sources and get them from foods, as well.

The Dangers of Maltodextrin

There are some potential side effects from consuming too much maltodextrin. Detroyer explains, “It can spike blood sugar, so [maltodextrin] is problematic for people with diabetes or reactive hypoglycemia.” This is due to its high glycemic index of 106-136, which means that it allows for the rapid release of glucose, thus raising one’s blood sugar. It is also high in calories, therefore too much of it can lead to weight gain, so be careful about consuming excessive amounts, if you’re looking to manage your weight.

“Maltodextrins, the type that is digested, have [also] been associated with negative changes to gut bacteria,” says Detroyer. “It can be problematic for someone with celiac disease, even though the proteins are removed with processing,” she adds. “It causes an inflammatory response in those that are allergic.” Not only that, people with [IBS](#) and other similar conditions need to be careful, as it can cause gas and [bloat](#).

How to Limit Maltodextrin

To minimize the effects of maltodextrin, combine it with some [fiber](#) or protein that will help slow down its digestion. “We highly recommend people

avoid processed foods with additives, because of their impact on the body,” says Detroyer. “It can be problematic with people who have IBS and [those with] difficulty digesting sugars from plants.”

It’s also best to eat low on the food chain to limit consumption of maltodextrin. Detroyer recommends consuming, “fruits, veggies, grains, fish, chicken, beef, pork, tofu, edamame, [and] beans. Look for dairy products that do not have additives, and limit how [much] you eat [of ones] that do.”

Another great idea is to try using or consuming products that contain maltodextrin alternatives, such as [stevia](#), honey, and dates. Look for products that have these better alternatives, and make sure that you are reading labels.