ARTIFICIAL sweeteners are now scattered throughout the western diet in around 5,000 foods, as a substitute for sugar in the west’s vain effort to curtail the obesity epidemic.

Most contain aspartame - which once was classified as a biochemical warfare agent by the US government.

Scientific evidence suggests that this so called ‘healthy’ option can trigger a number of side effects and may even lead to serious illness.

In aspartame’s early days the FDA (Food and Drug Administration) did not approve it’s introduction for around eight years due to the number of scientific reports showing that it caused damage to the central nervous system and caused cancer in animal experiments.

For some reason aspartame was approved in 1981 and is now found in diet foods and drinks (including some big name drinks), chewing gum, cereals, sweets, jam, drugs and even in some vitamin type preparations.

So what is aspartame? It is made up of amino-acids aspartic acid and phenylalanine - and methanol - the alcohol found in methylated spirits. The chemical bonds are broken and further toxins are metabolised such as formaldehyde, formic acid and DKP.

Promoters of aspartame argue that aspartic acid and phenylalanine are found in food and so are safe but in food they are bound to proteins so are released slowly and are more easily metabolised. In aspartame they exist in the free form, which releases them into the blood stream at higher levels. Methanol can also exist in nature in fruit but again in a bound form (to pectin), which facilitates easier metabolism.

If you wish to read more then you’ll find The Ecologist magazine Sept 05 very interesting. Also a documentary Sweet Misery is available on DVD - check www.soundandfuryproductions.com.

Foods can also contain aspartame but it may be listed as ”contains phenylalanine” or E-number E.951.

The best way to avoid ingesting this product is not to eat processed food, but to cook fresh at all times. In fact cooking food yourself is usually cheaper so why pay for something that is risking your health?

When we consider that as much as 2000 tonnes of this stuff is being consumed in Europe per year and rising, we should take care that this sweetener doesn't have a bitter end.